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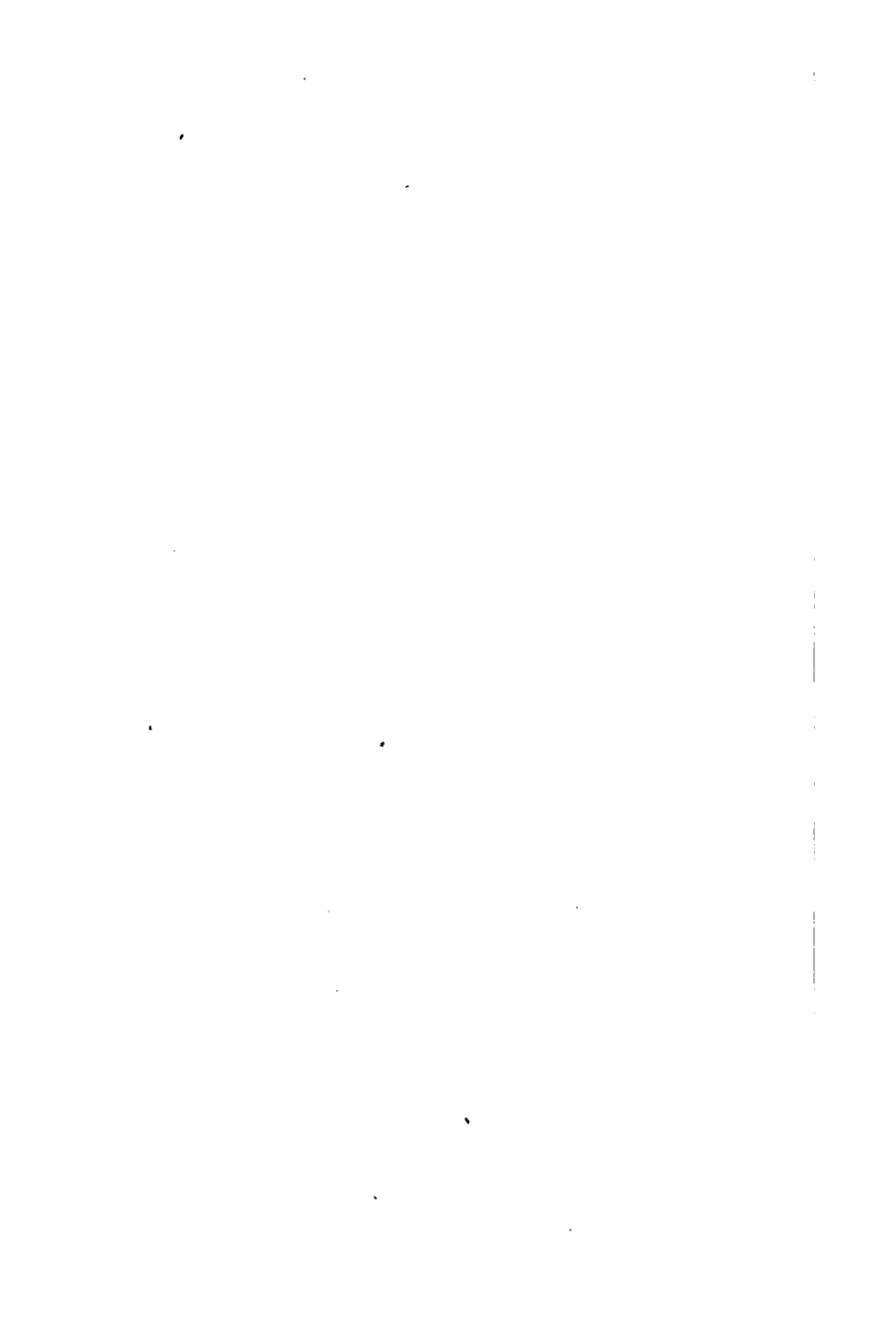
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AM I TOO LATE?

W. E. DOUGLASS







Am I too late?

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Am I too late ?

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BY THE

REV. W. E. COGHLAN, B.A.,

Author of "The Conflict and the Crown."



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SERMON I.

SEEKING AND FINDING.

JOB XXXIII. 3.

“Oh, that I knew where I might find Him !”

THESE pathetic words of the inspired and suffering Gentile express the universal instinct of mankind. The rudest nations of bygone days and far off lands, encamping beside the rivers beneath the shade of the trees, have listened for God's voice in the rushing of the waters and the rustling of the leaves. The wondrous beauty of creation has preached to them of the might and majesty of the Creator: the best of them have often sought Him, struggling through the little light vouchsafed to their weak and wandering souls: each one has been conscious of a vague unsatisfied longing within, which things merely human could never set at rest: “Oh, that I “knew where I might find Him,” is the sigh of

each spirit seeking after God ; and the Gospel revelation comes in with the sweet comfort of a Father's love, pointing out to us the only way to the treasure that we long for. In Jesus Christ, God is revealed unto us in beauty and perfection so far as we may know Him : our knowledge still must be partial until the night has passed away and we know as we are known ; but, even now, we may know Him as neither Jew nor Gentile ever could. If, with all our hearts, in Jesus Christ, we truly seek Him, we shall ever surely find Him ; the soul's purest aspiration can be satisfied, and the voice of her complaint hushed sweetly into silence.

If, then, we know in whom God is revealed, that in Jesus Christ He presents Himself as One who may be found by struggling humanity, as One who is eager that His voice should be heard and His spirit felt, deep within the soul of every child of man ; what is the seeking that shall at length be rewarded by a vision of the true Light ? It is easy to see what it is not, what it can never be. It is not the sitting down, with folded arms across the breast, dreaming the hours away in silent meditation, although our thoughts may be fixed on things divine and beautiful. It is not

the attempt, which never yet has fully succeeded, to be truly moral and truly noble, receiving the Christ as a merely human teacher, shorn of His Divinity, and spoiled of His royal robes. To give Jesus of Nazareth the dignity of a philosopher merely human, and to deny Him His title of Emmanuel, is to betray the Son of Man with the kiss of Judas. The true seeking that can surely find is nothing that is listless, nothing that is lukewarm, nothing that wavers and falters as the years roll on.

To seek for God, with the heart's true longing to find Him, is a never ceasing anxiety to know Him fully as He has revealed Himself in Jesus our Lord, an anxiety which is present as our eyelids close in sleep, and when we awake to the morning hymn of praise. It is a resolution firm and unwavering to regard our manhood as altogether missing its mark and falling short of its dignity, except so far as it partakes of the Divine image, and is guided by the Divine will : it is the desire of resting on His arm, as some weak, confiding child, would trust to a father's care the entire guidance of its life : it is the willingness to resign our will to His will, a complete sacrifice of self upon His altar. If, with all our hearts

we thus truly seek Him, we shall ever surely find Him, thus saith our God.

Behold the men of the world seeking for fame or for fortune, through the changes and chances of this mortal life; some of them stand out in strong relief as examples of energy and untiring zeal! How many exhibit a pattern of unsubdued perseverance which puts easily to shame the faint-hearted seekers after God! Day by day the fresh difficulties which arise in their path, serve only to increase their self-discipline, and to multiply their hearty efforts. And all this for the things that perish!

Alas! with many seekers after God, a little cloud that seems to hide the light is enough to damp their energy and weaken their faith; a few troubles of the daily life and disappointments of cherished hopes, cause them to lose their confidence in God's universal Providence. Their incapacity to comprehend many mysteries both of human nature and Divine Revelation, fills their mind with soul-destroying doubts as to God's willingness to reveal Himself in Christ. "Oh, "that I knew where I might find Him!" ceases in time to be the earnest longing of their souls, and the mainspring of every action of their lives.

And yet, who has ever preached, at least among inspired men, that to find God, to apprehend Him as He has revealed Himself, is an easy matter, the task of one passing hour, even to the most willing and earnest among struggling souls? Oftentimes has the way to be trodden in slow and painful movement, in darkness and in tears: sometimes there is hidden, solitary anguish, sometimes treading on the stones with bleeding feet. The multitude of old who thirsted for greater knowledge and further proofs of the Saviour's Divine power, had many miles to run to outstrip the little boat that crossed the waters of the sea of Galilee. They for a time gave up all thoughts of worldly occupations, forgot even the call of nature, the necessary food that sustains the body. How richly were they rewarded! Once more there fell upon their ears the sound of His divine voice, once more the sick were restored whole to the friends who loved them.

He manifested to them, too, His divine power in the wonderful miracle of the feeding of the five thousand, in which the Church has ever loved to see prefigured the supernatural feeding in the Eucharistic feast. Thank God, it is possible to repeat the miracle, and still to feed the hungry

multitudes who seek Him with contrite hearts. There is still the giving of thanks and the breaking of the bread. If the words be not uttered by His own divine voice, if the bread be not broken by His own high-priestly hands, still the promise, "Lo ! I am with you always, even unto "the end of the world," transfers the virtue and perpetuates the power. All contrite penitents who seek God in the bread broken and the wine poured out, may surely know that herein He may be found.

Were it not for the splendid revelation of His mercy in His own inspired record, we might still be in doubt as to His gracious attitude to all those sin-weary souls who are earnestly striving to find Him. Who can read unmoved that beautiful story in the gospel of St. Luke, the pearl of our Master's parables, wherein, sinful man is portrayed wandering from his Father's home, and marring the purity of his soul by carnal indulgence ; tasting the pleasures, one by one, which the world and the flesh have to offer, and then flinging them aside all unsatisfied and longing still for food : wherein, too, God is set forth as watching and waiting for the penitent's cry, beholding him while still afar off,

meeting him with open arms, and hastening to welcome him to his deserted home? How many sinners, almost hopeless, humanly speaking, in their degradation, far, far away in a wilderness of crime, having forgotten every hymn and prayer learnt in more innocent days, and literally living without God in the world; how many such have been touched to the quick by this simple story, and taught to hope and pray for a reconciliation with their offended Father, breathing forth at last the aspiration of the suffering Gentile, "Oh, that I knew where I might find Him!"

What a marvellous scene was that in the house of Simon the Pharisee, where Jesus, very God of very God, sat at meat! Quietly and tremblingly there came in a poor, sinful woman, an outcast from all that was holy and pure, Our Lord's loving condescension to this poor Magdalen surely is meant to teach us His attitude of welcome to all who rightly seek Him—who strive to enter into the chamber where He really is. Centuries have rolled away since that banquet in the Pharisee's house, but nothing has changed in the crying needs of the human soul and the attitude of our Father in Heaven, in and through Jesus, His own Son, most truly God.

Our Father in Heaven! Yes; we love to have it so; to call Him by that dear name which most fully describes His attitude and His love. Thus to speak of Him in the language of His own revelation must enforce a hearing, must awaken an echo within the human heart. It needs no high and lofty intellect to grasp this thought in the fulness of its power; no deep and hardly-earned learning to see it in the unfading freshness of its beauty. From the acts and the love of our earthly parents we may lead up reverently to the purer and greater love of our Father in Heaven, and learn from the care of those to whom we owe our earthly life, that God loves to catch the first sound of the trembling prayer of every soul who longs for the spirit to seek Him, and the power to find Him.

Who has not watched sometimes, in wonder, the self-denial and forbearance of some parents towards their children, as they begin to start in life for themselves, and enter, on their own account, on the great battle of the world? Countless instances are on record of unselfish devotion, of forgiveness, again and again, after repeated forgetfulness and neglect. There are many heavy hearted fathers now grieving over their wayward,

ungrateful children, who would count it unspeakable joy to give the best that they have to clasp them once more to their heart, and restore them again to the place they have lost. In placing our God before us under the image of a Father, Holy Scripture adds power and beauty to its appeal, for in that one word are shown forth vividly and unmistakably to the human mind and heart, the love, forbearance, long-suffering and forgiveness of Him Whom we seek, Whom we long to find, as the only satisfaction for the needs and cravings of the human soul.

But while we stand enraptured, our hearts filled with gratitude, at His merciful condescension and His willingness to receive sinners, His eagerness to be found of them who seek after Him if haply they may find Him, we must never forget His majesty nor ignore His kingly estate, that He must be sought and found in His own appointed way. Look out upon the world with its multitude of denominations all called Christian and see how many are seeking Him where He has never promised to be found—they have not entered the guest chamber where He is sitting at meat. In modern days many have started aside from the Church Catholic, His own

institution, like a broken bow—from her to whom alone the Divine Charter has been delivered. The answer to the aspiration “Oh, that I knew “where I might find Him”! is not to be found in human systems, the modern creations of ignorant and unlearned men, however enthusiastic and determined they may be. His avowed presence is in His Church—the ark which is riding on safely through storm and tempest to the haven of rest. We hear much in these days of Christian charity and forbearance; and we are asked to believe and to teach that all seekers after God, whether they be walking in the good old paths trodden by the apostles and martyrs of the Primitive Church, or going dreamily along in newly cut ways of men’s invention, are sure to find Him at last. Such teaching and preaching can never be in the true spirit of Christian charity which is love unfeigned. The love which burns brightly within the heart of Jesus bids me earnestly to implore all men to walk in The Highway of the King of kings, if they would at last reach His glorious palace, and dwell for ever in the unfading beauty of His presence.

Moreover we dare not sit down under the dangerous belief that to find our Heavenly

Father in Christ and to clasp Him to our hearts is the result of one brief conflict, the struggle of a day. The whole life of the earnest seekers after God is an unceasing battle. It is this very battle we have to fight that makes us fit companions and true brethren of those who have already fought it and have gone to their rest : every fresh fall gives to us the spirit of meekness and humility, and, if we rise again upon the ruins of our former lives, we become nearer to the poor in spirit to whom is promised the kingdom of Heaven : every sorrow has its power to soften the stubborn heart, and if borne with that holy prayer upon the lips, "Thy will be done," gives to us that blessed promise of Christ that "They who mourn shall be comforted." Every fresh victory over unclean and unholy thoughts speaks to us of that loving assurance of the Sermon on the Mount, that the pure in heart shall some day see their God.

It is the wonderful mercy and love of our Father that He has not left us to sleep away our lives till death shall summon us hence; the battle within is a sign of life, the struggle is a promise of victory; the harder the fight, the more powerful the foe, the more honour to him who conquers, and brighter

the crown. We have, doubtless, read of weary travellers in the midst of snow—one grand, white carpet upon the earth as far as the eye could reach ; drowsiness comes upon them, their eyes ache, their limbs grow weak and languid, they long to lie down and rest. What would they do had they not some friend to keep them moving on the journey? If they were to sleep there that sleep would prove their last. So is it with the soul's great struggle for the mastery, to find and to rest in God. We often feel weary, we often feel drowsy, but we dare not rest until the end has come. There are thousands of voices calling us to struggle on, if only we will listen and obey. God has given His angels charge over us if only we will hear their whispers of Holiness ; the Holy Spirit is leading us in tender love to fight with the armour of God, the Strength of our Redeemer : it is no easy matter ; an easy battle were not worth the fight : the glorious finding of God and resting in His eternal bosom cannot be in store for the cowards and traitors in His army ; it is meant only for those who have fought a brave fight and, though often wounded and worsted, have risen after every fall and sought Him afresh in Jesus the only begotten.

Of course, while upon earth, we can never hope to find God in the fulness of His perfection, in the ineffable Majesty of His beauty : He will not stand before us fully revealed until this mortal shall have put on immortality : this blessed result of a life-long search, the vision of the King in His beauty, shall be the portion of the redeemed when their warfare is accomplished.

But, even now, in the midst of fightings without and fears within, we may, in a measure, find Him and walk on humbly by His side. To find Him upon earth is to love Him with all our heart ; to dedicate to Him our whole being ; to acknowledge Him as our King and Governor : and moreover to feel that this absorbing worship is the soul's truest delight and treasure, beside which all other things fade into insignificance : beside which riches are a bursting bubble and the world an empty name. And this rapture of the soul in His service need not interfere with any lawful calling nor the innocent recreations of youth ; we may seek Him in the midst of the busy world and realize His presence in the midst of toil, even when we are bearing the heat and burden of the day. This finding of the loving Father in Jesus His Son, here amid the clouds and mists of a

sin-stricken world, is at best imperfect ; it is not all that glorified man shall be capable of ; it is the reflection of Light, not the full blaze of Glory ; it is beholding His face covered by a veil through which alone He can be seen by us who have but a short time to live. This seeking after God through Christ is the godliness which has the promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come ; it gives resignation in the hour of trouble, light in the time of darkness and difficulty, and noble courage in the hour of death. Many saints and martyrs have tried it and left their record behind them of its almighty power to bless.

Behold the aged martyr Polycarp in the hour of his dissolution looking up to Heaven in calm serenity ; listen to his words :—" Oh " Lord God Almighty, the Father of Thy Well-
" Beloved and Blessed Son, Jesus Christ, by
" Whom we have received the knowledge of Thee,
" the God of Angels, powers, and of every crea-
" ture, and of the whole race of just men who
" live in Thy presence : I give Thee hearty
" thanks that Thou hast vouchsafed to bring me
" to this day and to this hour, that I should have
" a part in the number of Thy martyrs, in the

“cup of Thy Christ, to the Resurrection of
“Eternal Life, both of soul and body, in the in-
“corruptibleness of the Holy Ghost.”

“Hail precious Cross,” said the lion-hearted
St. Andrew as he came to the instrument of his
lingering death, “Hail, precious Cross, that hast
“been consecrated by the Body of my Lord, and
“adorned with His limbs as with rich jewels. I
“come to thee exulting and glad; receive me
“with joy into thy arms. Oh, good Cross, that
“hast received beauty from our Lord’s limbs! I
“have ardently loved thee; long have I desired
“and sought thee; now thou art found by me,
“and art made ready for my longing soul;
“receive me into thy arms, taking me from
“among men, and present me to my Master,
“that He who redeemed me on thee may receive
“me by thee.”

Thus has the life-long search for God in Christ
the power to make us all Heroes of the Cross, with
the hope sure and certain of passing through the
conflict to the Crown.

Some amongst us, my brethren, may fear that
we are *too late*, that we have put it off too long:
that the miserable remnant of life now left to us
is too short in which to find our God, except,

indeed, as a consuming fire. There may be some on earth who are too late, whose hearts are too hard, whose consciences are too dull, who have obliterated the image of their Divine Creator, and wrought themselves into objects without love or beauty : they have no ardent desire to seek God as their Father, no penitential tears for their innumerable violations of His law. There may be some such as these ; I cannot tell. But this surely is true : If there be within our hearts the ardent aspiration of Job, "Oh, that I knew "where I might find Him," that I might come to His feet and cast myself in lowly penitence before Him ; if we are willing to look upon the Saviour on the Cross as the ground of our pardon and reconciliation ; if we are resolved to cast the wicked past behind us and lead a new life, following with earnestness the commandments of God and the ordinances of His blood-bought Church : *then we are not too late* ; we may seek and we shall surely find : find on earth in strength, and energy and worship : find in Heaven in the unceasing ecstasy of the Sabbath rest.

O Hope of every contrite heart,
O Joy of all the meek,

To those who ask how kind Thou art,
How good to those who seek !

But what to those who find ? Ah ! this
Nor tongue nor pen can show ;
The love of Jesus, what it is
None but His loved ones know.

SERMON II.

WILT THOU BE CLEANSED?

ST. MARK i. 40.

“If Thou wilt, Thou canst make me clean.”

THERE are many things concerning which men may entertain different opinions, not bound by the surmises or speculations of past generations, or tied to any one particular school of thought. There are theories, in what is popularly and ignorantly called science, which may be discussed and disputed about without injury to any vital truth—without departure from Divine Revelation. “So many men, so many opinions,” has been a saying from the very dawn of the World’s history: meant to treat upon the changes and chances of this mortal life, and the theories of philosophy merely human, but never to touch for a moment the immutable truths of God, which are from everlasting to everlasting; there

is no room for speculation where the Spirit has revealed, no place for doubt where Christ has spoken.

There can be no speculation, no doubt, as to the destroying power of sin upon the soul and the body of man. It is the dark cloud which hides the loving Father's face ; the silencing of angels' voices which would comfort and inspire the soul, rightly impressed, with the dignity of his right royal manhood. It is the all-prevailing plague spot, inherited from generation to generation, which none save God can banish or destroy.

It made its fearful power felt before Adam and Eve were banished from the Garden, and the flaming sword of Cherubim kept the way : it entered into the courts above, and there was war in Heaven. We are taught to reverence and to honour that countless throng of sinless angels before the throne of the Almighty ; "we can form no conception of their happiness, of their holy freedom, nor the ecstasy of their ceaseless worship:" it is theirs to minister in the very temple of Heaven itself, in the very presence of Him Whom to behold will be the joy of the redeemed. Few things can give us a more

startling picture of the overwhelming power of evil: few things can make us shrink more fervently from its seductions than the fact that among the numbers of the angels some are missing; they are not all there; "some places are empty; some voices are hushed; some harps are silent; some spirits, once exalted and pure, created to be priests in Heaven's Temple, and ministering spirits to human souls, once living in the light of God, and feeling unspeakably happy in the beatific vision, have gone away for ever from the Father's presence, and are leagued together in unalterable enmity to all Heaven's purposes and all human happiness."

Who has time to stay, in the absence of Divine Revelation explicit and direct; who has time to stay, as the fast rolling years cut off, one by one, opportunities of penitence and worship—to stay to speculate as to when, and how, and whence this evil came into the world to blight the happiness of angels and of men? 'Tis enough that it is here, the plague spot upon body and soul of generation after generation. All History is the record of its power to hurl kings and queens from their thrones, to hasten kingdoms to their ruin, to cut off the budding promise of

the sweet young life, and embitter the declining years of aged men. It is not the soul alone it has power to touch : the whole being, soul and body together decays before it, and sinks degraded in the holy eyes of God.

Take some young child, whose whole life ought to be light and joyous : to whom to live and have its being in the sweet young days of early life ought to be happiness itself—who ought to feel the sunshine to be the warmth of the great Father's love shedding innumerable blessings on its path. One shudders to think how many children feel nothing of this brightness, never feel in the body the joys of being the creation of the God of Love : who sigh away their young life in sad deformity, their limbs bent, their beauty all marred, dying daily ere they begin to live. Oh ! you who are young and happy, pray for such as these : it is not their fault. It is the inherited evil of generations of sinning men and sinning women, the accumulating and mysterious fruit of man's first disobedience. Who could bear such burdens as these without the hope, secure and strong, that God some day shall clothe them in beauty, and make them, as they were meant to be made, in the likeness of His holy image !

Or take some man, once of noble intellect, of untiring energy, of brightest promise, now raving his life away within the prison's bars : muttering to himself in fancied dialogue : dreaming dreams all the day, which to him are awful realities, and full of terror, causing him to clasp his hands and strain his eyes as he beholds some fancied foe : doomed thus to end his days in frightful, unreal pictures—a helpless, hopeless madman. Oh ! pray for such as these, it is not their fault ; it is the old plague spot, cruel once again after years of slumber, the accumulated bitterness of man's many sins. At such a sight as this the unbeliever curses God while he whose faith can picture Calvary with the Cross erect, dwells upon the coming restoration when such even as these shall be made whole.

Sad as these pictures are of evil's unfailing power, there are others sadder still, which preach the soul's corruption—the cutting off of the springs of spiritual life. Few can have come to anything like manhood's years without having seen young souls blighted and cast out into the night by the mighty power of sin. But without taking extreme cases, which from time to time

force themselves upon us in startling reality, we can all feel its blighting power within ourselves, the bitter poison as it mars our happiness—"Why art thou so heavy, oh! my soul, and why "art thou disquieted within me?" Because the seductions of the world, the flesh, and the devil, are enticing us to forget our origin and destiny, and fix our eyes upon the fleeting earth, and do dishonour to God's redeeming Love.

And God has not left us to guess all this—to argue it out by nature's light alone—and toss our arms about in agony as in despair we cry for help. The poison of a sinful life, and the power to cleanse, are the outspoken revelation of all inspired men. Sin and its remedy, Sin and its remedy, are the burden of the songs of inspired poets, and the exhortations of Evangelists and martyred Apostles. The great disease, and He who alone has power to heal; the one in all its virulent impurity, the other, in His long-suffering mercy, are brought side by side in the narrative from which I take the text.

Jesus Christ, the Good Physician, the Divine Healer, had just delivered that wonderful sermon on the mount, wherein he rebuked Jewish hypocrisy, and scattered old prejudices to the

winds. As He came down He was met by a miserable object crouching and trembling before the crowd. There was not one in that mixed multitude that would have touched him with his finger, as he himself proclaimed his own disease, and cried with his own lips, "unclean, unclean." I need not now enter into all the horrible symptoms of that most fearful disease: it is enough that it was chosen by Almighty God to show forth the daily dying, the ever increasing corruption of the men living in sin unrepented of and unforgiven. As none could heal it save God, so none but God could cleanse the sinner, and restore him pure and whole to the congregation of His people.

This leprosy of the body has passed away, but the leprosy of the soul is still amongst us. We have still to cry "unclean, unclean," as we count over the many sins and shortcomings of our daily life, and look at our acts, and thoughts, and words, in the beautiful light of Christ's most holy example. "If Thou wilt, Thou canst make me clean," were the words of the leper in the twilight of Christian Faith: "*If Thou wilt.*" He had not yet beheld the loving, self-denying life, the gentle forbearance under smiting and

provocation, the lonely agony in Gethsemane, the shame and bitterness of the Cross and Crown of thorns.

In the fulness of Christian Revelation I know that He is willing. I know it by the deep humiliation and self renunciation in His descent from the glorious palace of the King of kings, and Lord of lords, to become the child of the lowly Virgin, and all for us. I know it by the mystery of His Holy Incarnation: by His Holy Nativity and Circumcision: by His Baptism, fasting and temptation: by His Agony and Bloody Sweat: by His Cross and Passion: by His precious Death and Burial: by His glorious Resurrection and Ascension, and by the coming of the Holy Ghost. If all this was for the redemption of the world, I know that He is willing to cleanse my soul from all its stains.

Oh! if He thus be willing with burning love, how is it that so many call in vain—so many, apparently in earnest in the utterance of their heart's desire, sad at contemplation of their own continued impurity, like birds vainly beating at the bars of their cage, unable to get out and soar heavenward? There are many who will tell you that they are seeking earnestly for the light of

day, and all the time no answer comes—they are dwelling in the darkness of the night. Some even will declare in their despondency that their day of grace has passed away, that they are too late. But is the willingness of Christ all that is wanted to make the leper whole, the cry of the lip all mighty to bring down the healing power? Surely not. The pleading question of the pain-stricken leper is turned round, by Christ Himself, upon the kneeling suppliant, “Art thou willing to be cleansed?” It is not enough to lie down, sighing sentimentally for the cleansing power, dreaming it will come to us as we repose in listless inactivity. The father received with open arms the returning son, but the prodigal arose, and left the food of swine behind him, and hastened to his father’s house. Christ is surely willing to cleanse us, but we must be willing to be cleansed. He will cleanse us in His own way, not in ours. In the sweet picture of His mercy we forget that He is a King, right royal in His majesty and power, that at His feet the angels bow in deep devotion and reverent worship.

And besides this, surely few only amongst us rightly estimate the impurity of our souls, and

realize indeed that they are sick unto death. We are all of us willing enough to believe that the body has its sicknesses, because we feel the pains, and see with our eyes the sad work of disease that can bring a strong frame to ruin. We readily believe, too, in the sorrows and pains of the human heart, for we feel the dark shadows that creep over our life, and often make us sad; and we behold our fellow men sometimes bowed down by a weight of woe which shortens their days upon earth. But we are not so ready to believe in and to realise the sicknesses and diseases which have power to sink the soul into death. And yet it is true, that just as the body sinks, and the eye grows dim, and the strength of the limbs vanishes away, so the soul is, day by day, made sick and ill by repeated sin : sin of which we do not heartily repent, for which we do not crave on our knees the forgiveness of God our Father. Yes ! we have need of all the healing powers that are centred in the Lord Jesus Christ, the Good Physician, who can cure both the body and the soul, and cheer the drooping heart.

We are reminded everywhere of the scene around the Pool of Bethesda, and the ear of

faith may catch the sound of the Saviour's loving voice, "Wilt thou be made whole?" The blind in their darkness were there. Who can say that he has a clear and cloudless vision to look upon the things of God? The vapours rising from the earth have dimmed our sight. The mysteries of Heaven's Revelation are misinterpreted, robbed of their beauty and their virtue by the pride of human intellect; the Sacraments of the Holy Church of Christ are but too often degraded, and their life-restoring power denied them. Many of us, too, are miserably blind. The lame were there. Who can say that he can walk alone and unaided on the path that leads through this stormy world? We are ever stumbling and falling, wounding and bruising our wayward souls. We limp along with faltering steps, without energy, and vigour, and soundness of limb, to bring us safely to the end of our pilgrimage. We, too, are miserably lame. The weak and the faint were there. Who can say that his soul has any power to do or think one holy thing unaided or alone? We are full of sicknesses and sores which must be healed ere we can work on with enthusiasm like men. We, too, are miserably faint and ill.

To each soul, sensible of its own sore need of help from Heaven, and bowed down by the weight of its guilt, there is addressed still the question of the Friend of sinners to the sufferer by Bethesda's Pool, "Wilt thou be made whole?" Oh, who would not respond eagerly and gratefully to the words that offer life? One would think that all who hear that voice would cling fondly to the outstretched arm, and cry, "Lord, 'Thou knowest our sicknesses, Thou knowest 'how weak and feeble our souls have become, O 'come and heal us! we would indeed be made 'whole, cleansed from the foul stains that keep us 'from holiness, and poison our purest joys.'" But we must not lose sight of the warning fact, that many falsely estimate the nature of that willingness which our Redeemer requires. A sick man has often longed and prayed for the blessing of health, and, when restored once more to vigour, renewed the wasting disease by a return to the dissipation of his former life. We may desire to have the Crown, and yet turn away discontented from the Cross it must first be ours to bear; we may long for the blessing of peace, and yet refuse to enter the army to do battle with our foe, to act all our life long the warrior's

part, by which alone we can win the victory.

We may answer with the first warm impulse of gratitude, that we are willing that Christ should make us whole ; we may long ardently to be rid of this burden of sin, this body of death, to feel more ready to go when our Father shall call us. But are we willing to drop the darling sins we love so well, that please the unclean desires of the flesh ? Are we willing to trust fully and faithfully in the sacrifice of our Saviour Christ ? Are we willing to have no treasures upon earth save those we can resign into the keeping of Heaven—to value less and less the gold we labour for, the food that feeds the body, the things that merely lead to human exaltation, the joys that dazzle with the false glitter of the world ? Are we willing to forgive those who do us wrong, to forgive our brother though he sin against us to the number of seventy times seven, to bear upon our shoulders every burden our Father gives us, and to say, “ Thy will, O God, not mine, be done ? ”

We must take the Holy Physician at His word without any compromises or concessions of truth ; we must think nothing unimportant which He has revealed and enjoined : we must give to his Holy

Sacraments the honour and the virtue which He has decreed should be theirs, walking in His appointed ways, well trodden by His own cherished saints and martyrs, who are now awaiting the resurrection to life. If thus in complete submission throwing ourselves upon His mercy and believing in His power. we pray with trembling lips, "Lord, cleanse my soul, for I know that Thou art willing," we cannot be too late ; the ear of faith may catch the tones of the loving voice "I will, be thou clean." For we may be clean now by the indwelling of the Holy Ghost, and, as from time to time in the bitterness of the conflict, fresh transgressions make fresh stains upon our souls, we may be cleansed again by penitence and confession, sincere and resolute, and by the life-imparting power of the spiritual food—until the time when we can take the Saviour's hand and pass through the rushing waters to the smiling land beyond, where there is no need of cleansing, for there is no sin.

SERMON III.

HONEST DOUBT.

JOHN XX. 29.

“ Jesus saith unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen me thou hast believed : blessed are they that have not seen and yet have believed.”

It would be worse than useless for the Christian preacher, addressing his brethren in the flesh, to ignore the existence of any one human infirmity; and speaking in language which his heart can never realize, point in confidence to the full perfection of the Christian standard, altogether denying the difficulties and dangers that meet us at every stage of our journey. It would be impossible for us to comprehend the exalted morality of an angelic being, around whose whole nature the halo of infinite purity had cast its bright light, banishing for ever all possibility of sin, all chance of falling ; his

language might arrest the attention, and fix it in awful wonder as we perceived its Heavenly beauty ; but could never touch one chord within the human heart encompassed with human frailty and unable to comprehend angelic perfection.

What we long after is heart speaking unto heart ; we crave for the beautiful gift of sympathy ; the voice of one whose tones are sweet and true, pleading with his own flesh and blood, conscious himself of the dangers and quicksands against which he is warning, and having himself tasted of that heavenly food which he is offering to the sheep of Heaven's flock. The gentlest forbearance to the weak toiling after strength ; the purest sympathy with the fallen striving to rise again : ardent fellow-feeling for the faithless seeking for faith, for the sorrow-stricken sighing for comfort : an unselfish rejoicing with those whose prayers poured forth from an agonized heart have been heard and answered, and heart-felt words of brotherly encouragement unto all, as they toil on through time to eternity.

Such a perfect sympathy is not to be found in the ascetic hermit, passing the lingering hours of his selfish life in some cave in the wilderness, offering to Heaven a barren faith, and despising

the honour of labour for the fascination of sentiment, pouring forth prayer after prayer to Heaven from a heart that is touched by the feeling of no infirmities, save those that trouble his own selfish breast. You will doubtless remember that the poet Tennyson draws a striking picture in more than striking language, of one who thus in loneliness continues night and day "battering the gates of Heaven with storms of prayer," crying unceasingly, "Have mercy, Lord, "and take away my sin." He had surely done better to have come forth from his desolation, and toiled amongst his fellows in the light of day, ere the night should have ended his labours. Of all the thousands of souls born into the world not one can be spared to waste his life alone ; the prayers that are borne upwards in golden censers, and join in that great volume of incense, accepted before the throne, are followed up with Christlike devotion in banishing the bitterness from the cup of fallen man, which is now well-nigh brim full of sin and of sorrow.

Such a perfect sympathy, however, is to be found in the greatest Preacher and Teacher the world has ever known. As He is striving to renovate violated morality and outraged virtue,

one is awe-struck at His forbearance; as He would banish from an antiquated creed, which, once heavenborn, had been corrupted by human inventions, as He would banish from it all that would not and could not bear the full blaze of Heaven's searching light, one is struck with admiration at His gentle handling of human imperfections, His marvellous long-suffering in the midst of human tyranny.

Behold Him washing even the feet of a Judas, if perchance he might be made clean: uttering warnings not to be misunderstood, if perchance they might touch his heart; suffering his traitorous presence at the last supper, if perchance, on the brink of his crime, he might be arrested on his road to ruin. Behold Him warning the impetuous Peter of the precipice on which he was standing, and pouring forth an ardent intercession before the throne of His Father, that in the end his weakened faith might not altogether fail. Behold Him, all the frailties and pains for ever banished from His own pure body, coming into the midst of His chosen band, its mystic number now diminished by the traitor's fall, coming to breathe the peace of Heaven upon their troubled souls, to convince the doubter and confirm his

faith. There was no stern rebuke for the faltering allegiance ; no harsh condemnation of his waning confidence. He knew how prone human nature is to doubt the reality of that which cannot be beheld by the bodily eye : He gave only a mild reproach to His afterwards dauntless disciple—"Thomas, "because thou hast seen Me thou hast believed ; "blessed are they that have not seen and yet "have believed."

It would be vain, then, to ignore the fact that, to us, doubt and uncertainty are a veritable necessity of our nature ; we are toiling on in the dimness of the twilight, and we must wait for the full burst of the light of everlasting day. There are few things upon which we can surely count, no human arm we can firmly grasp in the full certainty of comfort and consolation. We cannot tell, by to-morrow's dawn, whose place may be vacant amongst us, whose voice silent, never to be heard again on earth. Just as we behold the dark clouds obscuring the light of Heaven's sunshine ; just as, sometimes in the midst of the rapturous enjoyment of some lovely music, we hear a discord that startles with its ugliness ; so, often in the very midst of what we glory in as our happiness there comes over us the shadow of

unwelcome doubt, enough to damp our ardour and chill our enthusiasm.

Doubt is part and parcel of our inheritance as fallen man : it is a condition of our faculties impaired, of our souls vitiated by prevailing sin : often are we forced to doubt the sincerity of the heart in which once we trusted with implicit confidence : to disbelieve the lips from which we were once sure we could hear nothing but the truth in all its simplicity : warm hearts become cold : friends become enemies : children turn against their parents, and parents against their children ; full of change as is the face of nature with all its varying seasons, with its summer sun and its winter snow, more changeful still are the affairs of men and nations, giving us cause to doubt till we see with our eyes, and touch with our hands.

Jesus Christ, the most sympathizing of all teachers, never ignores this absolute necessity of our nature ; all his most matchless exhortations are meant to alleviate the pain and disquietude that thus hang like shadows over the human soul : His word which is Divine lives now in all its unalterable and majestic truth, as if uttered this very hour in the ears of every congregation

in the land ; all this mist is passing away before the rising of the sun : the longing of the mortal is soon to be changed into the beautiful reality of the promised immortality ; the unhappy uncertainty of the twilight of earth shall vanish before the blaze of Heaven's light ; the friendships concerning which we have cause to doubt on earth, shall be cemented hereafter by the unalterable bond of the love of the redeemed : and all this shall be after the resurrection of those who are lying asleep, and of those who have yet to pass through the valley of the shadow of death, after the resurrection, which has been made sure and certain in Him, the head of our race, who says to us, as to Thomas, doubting its reality, " Reach hither thy finger, and behold My " hands, and reach hither thy hand and thrust it " into My side, and be not faithless but believing."

There is nothing concerning which our reason has power to judge, for which Christ does not court a full and earnest investigation : if He speaks of Himself as one having power to banish blindness from the human heart, and cleanse it, as far as on earth it may be clean ; does He not point to miracles in which He healed the blindness of the bodily eye, and cleansed those who

were lepers in the flesh : are these not incontrovertible facts, proving His Divinity : resting on the testimony of men dying for their reality, and suffering for their promulgation : facts which, through centuries of persecution and storms could never be gainsaid ; which no infidel could ever disprove, no sceptic ever account for ?

The appeal is surely as strong to us as to Thomas of old : the whole scheme of redemption rests on the testimony of those who fought for it, bled for it, died for it : the learning of scholars, the heroism of soldiers, the fortitude of martyrs, the holiness of saints, the sufferings of confessors, all recorded in history, that none can dispute, present an invincible phalanx, against which unbelievers may fight in vain ; to escape the confession that Jesus is their Lord and their God they are forced to invent theories far more difficult to believe, far harder for the reason to comprehend, than the simple fact that God sent into the world His only-begotten Son to save miserable sinners from destruction : that He, perfect God and perfect Man, died and rose again : and that all who cling to His life and death, who are not faithless, but believing, shall ascend whither He has gone to prepare a place for them.

It is doubtless true that the dark shadows that sometimes hang over our souls are productive of much pain, sometimes almost of despair ; on the other hand, it is no less true that doubt has often led the enquiring mind to seek earnestly for the truth, and has induced our merciful Father, as He witnessed our struggles, to shed more of His heavenly light upon our wearying, earthly pilgrimage.

Before the grand Revelation of the Christian dispensation, history represents to us many noble, honest souls, groping earnestly in their darkness, seeking after God, if haply they might find Him ; men who, following the light of nature and of reason, have come almost to the threshold of the Gospel, almost touching the hem of our Saviour's garment. They burst away from the irksome bondage of the heathen priesthood, which led them to the revolting worship of some crawling reptile, or the unsatisfying creed that taught them to honour the Deity in the trees of the forest and the waves of the ocean ; in some river, flowing onwards in obedience to nature's law, or some flower that blossomed on its banks. In all the most beautiful and fascinating of heathen creeds (and some were not without their

beauty) they failed to recognize anything that could satisfy the ardent longing of their souls, or lead them in confidence to the brink of the unseen world. Had they never doubted the teaching of superstition, nor cast off the bondage of an absurd mythology, they had never come so near the truth, nor dug out from the deep mysteries of nature one doctrine to comfort their departing spirits. As it was, struggling and fighting with their doubts, they have left in their books sentiments which seem almost inspired: philosophy inculcating the practice of virtues, upon which Christianity smiles in approbation; history holding up to scorn the unworthy and crowning the noble and the good with the wreath of honour; poetry good enough, even now, to inspire the Christian with a longing after nobility and purity, proving to him how much, and how far he has strayed from the path which even an exalted nature is sufficient to discover.

And since Revelation has banished all the superstition and childishness of the heathen's creed, and has given us a merciful God to worship and a glorious immortality to work for, how much do we not owe to the enquiring spirit placed within us, which has led us to investigate

erroneous theories, and banish them from our creed. You may remember that Tennyson remarks in "In Memoriam,"

"There lives more faith in honest doubt,
Believe me, than in half the creeds."

More faith, that is, in searching, and sifting, and striving for the truth, than in the blind acceptance of a dogma without an effort to understand it. What faith is there in the daily repetition of the Church's creed, unless the heart feels what the mouth utters, and is convinced of its invincible truth ; repeating with the mouth alone all the great facts of the Incarnation and Redemption ; running through the sad catalogue of our Saviour's sufferings, referring in our prayers to the exploits of martyrs, and the purity of holy men who had gone before ; what can all this be but offering at Heaven's altar unhallowed fire, unless we feel the reality of all that we utter, and all that we plead ?

Better, far better, to doubt, to struggle, to pray, and to fight to be delivered from our difficulty ; than to settle down into an unworthy stagnation, receiving creeds, and dogmas, and ceremonies, because our fathers have left them as heirlooms from generation to generation.

Better far to doubt as we journey on, and to strive and pray for our doubts to be removed, than to feel easy and contented with the creed that we utter, when we have not opened a single book to test its accuracy, nor offered up a single prayer that it may be blessed to the saving of our souls.

I am speaking now of the honest Christian doubter, who, if he can clasp to his heart as invincible truth, the story of our Saviour's sufferings, His life and death, can see in it a refuge from all sorrow when the resurrection morning shall dawn ; one who is in real earnest about the saving of his soul, and longs ardently for more light, more faith, more love. Such an one has often to bless Heaven for the doubts and fears that have disturbed his tranquillity, and aroused him from his sentimental dreaming. He might have gone on dreaming and dreaming for ever, floating easily down the stream of life, fortified and secure, as he thought, in the ark of the visible Church, protected by creeds, and dogmas, and ceremonies, until coming to the shores of the last river to be crossed, he finds that all these things cannot save him, unless he works, and prays, and struggles ceaselessly

to save himself through the blood of Christ.

It is not fair for the infidels of the present or of any age to compare themselves with St. Thomas, and to declare that they, too, must see with the eye, and touch with the hand. Among the many sceptics that talk loudly about the free exercise of their reason, and the power of human intellect, there are not many who have taken the trouble to open a book, or examine a witness. The lazy, indolent unbeliever, who dismisses Christianity without a thought or a prayer, bears no resemblance to the Apostle who doubted for a time the possibility of the Resurrection. In the famous statue of St. Thomas, in Copenhagen, he stands the thoughtful, studious, meditative man, with the rule in his hand, for the due measurement of evidence and argument. The shallow scepticism of the present day violates the rules of evidence, and banishes logic from its argument; whilst the majority of its followers are suffering from an unhappy ignorance which clasps them in its fatal folds.

St. Thomas was a bold enquirer after truth, anxious for it, zealous for it; he would spare no pains to sift and to discover, but when once the light burst upon him his mind bowed before his

Master, he bears unflinching testimony to His Godhead, and dies to prove the Resurrection, which once for a time he has doubted.

It can never be too late for the honest prayerful doubter to bring all his difficulties in the spiritual life to the foot of Calvary's Cross, and plead there with the Divine Sympathizer, with all human frailties and imperfections, for more light, more faith, more love. In the midst of the clouds that encircle us, as we are passing like pilgrims through the night, we cannot see plainly all that God calls upon us to believe. But our Redeemer can bless us with the blessing of those who have not seen and yet can believe. We cannot see Him now with the bodily eye : the day of His miracles has passed away : we can ask for no material sign : but, if we will bend before Him and grasp it eagerly, ours shall be the blessedness of the children's faith, implicit confidence in a Father's love : holding His unseen hand we may safely travel through a world burdened with sin and overshadowed with doubt, until we pass into the land of beautiful realities which the glorified man shall be able to comprehend and clasp to his heart for ever.

SERMON IV.

PRAYER AND GOD'S SEEMING DELAY.

MATT. VII. 7.

“Ask, and it shall be given you ; seek, and ye shall find ; knock and it shall be opened unto you.”

NEVER, in the days of her darkest persecution ; never, when the sword was lifted against her, and was dyed with her children's blood ; never, even when the caves and the woods were filled with her fugitive sons and daughters ; has the Church been more savagely attacked, and her cherished and blood-bought doctrines impugned, than in these days of exalted reason and wide spread, so-called philosophy. The plain, simple, intelligible utterances of the God-man are not wise enough for some of us : our fancies, taking bolder flights, and soaring beyond the atmosphere of earth, presume to arbitrate concerning heavenly things : and the conclusions of centuries, the

witness of martyrs, the teaching of kings and poets manifestly inspired, these are to be set aside for the opinions of men who reason from premisses which are not sound, to conclusions which are impious and inhuman.

There are men who would tell us that the millions of supplications sent up from day to day from a sin-stained earth are the vain utterances of superstition and credulity ; that the chants and hymns are the useless homage of mistaken hearts, to a Being who either cannot or will not hear ; that the voice of a nation on its knees is powerless to alter a link in the chain of destiny, or to interrupt for a moment the reign of universal and unchangeable law. And we are asked to throw in our lot with a speculation that would place all loving, praying souls on the level of the bird beating its weary wings against the bars through which it may never pass ; in the full light of Christian Revelation we are asked to embrace a creed which in all its hardness and ugliness even the Heathen have been led by nature's voice to pronounce untenable by humanity. Nevertheless it is the creed of many, who when infants were received into the ark of Christ's Church ; whose mothers have

taught them to pray when reason was too weak to silence the prompting of their young hearts ; who have gradually cast off their allegiance to faith, and have fed their intellect with dangerous speculation, until they have come to treat the Gospel history as a fairy legend, and the story of the cross as a fascinating invention.

They ask us to try the efficacy of prayer by the test of statistics.—Take so many sick and ill, and see if your prayers will restore their failing strength ; if they will recover more quickly than those for whom no prayers are uttered, no petition put forth. Look at kings, and princes, and statesmen, for whom the nation utters its extravagant petitions in the same words at the same moment ; a whole volume of prayer ascending to Heaven in the same tongue. Do these men live longer than their fellows, or display that wisdom and purity sought after with importunity by thousands of suppliants on their knees ?

Such arguments as these are insults to the Majesty of the Eternal Trinity ; blasphemies against the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. Picture to yourselves a mere speck in the boundless universe, a puny unit almost lost in the infinity of created wonders ; falling on his knees

with the avowed purpose of testing the strength of his Maker's will, and the truth of his Maker's love ; deluding himself into the belief that a few hollow words, breathed forth in the attitude of supplication would bring from heaven a visible manifestation of the Divine approval, when they were prompted by the very spirit of unbelief which renders all prayer unavailing, and beats it back again to the earth from which it sprung. This is nothing but trying experiments with Divinity, from which all reverent souls must shrink in dread ; it is treating an infinite being as possessing all the weaknesses and vacillation of purpose which belong to the finite upon earth ; it is altogether fatal to the very notion of earnest supplication which pre-supposes a reverent belief in the omnipotence and omniscience of the Being with whom we plead, Who has power to tear off the veil that deceives humanity, and expose the heart of the hypocrite in all its hollowness and hardness.

I would rather be a heathen, living in the woods beneath the trees, and groping honestly after the God faintly shadowed forth in the majestic wonders of the Heavens above me, and the earth beneath me ; listening for His voice

in the murmuring of the rivers and the songs of the birds ; beholding His power in the rushing of the wind, and the violence of the storm ; guessing at His love in my own heart's pure longing for the mother that bore me, and the kith and kin that stirred within me the promptings of affection : I would rather have all the uncertainty of the twilight of the ancient world, than stand forward now before men with a history rich in all the dealings of God to man ; proved and tested by countless generations, who have left behind them as they passed away their unwavering testimony ; with documents setting forth the universal instinct which leads humanity to plead with a higher power ; and in the face of it all declare my disbelief in the willingness of our Father to incline His ear to the prayers and supplications of His miserable children.

I do not mean that every petulant cry of the passionate ; every impatient utterance of those in pain ; every murmur of perverse spirits labouring in sorrow their own sins have caused ; I do not mean that each and all of these have the power to ascend beyond the mists and vapours of earth into the unclouded atmosphere of Heaven, insuring immediate compliance with

the hasty petition, sending the ministering spirits on their mission of mercy. The permission to ask and to have does not open out to us the whole of Heaven's blessings, visible and invisible, physical and spiritual. We must take our place as links in the great chain, extending far back to the first man, on through the times of the prophets and apostles, the fall of nations, and the rise of others on their ruins, running on through the present into the future, the far off future of eternity ; and nothing can be granted to any of us which could break the chain and disunite the links ; it is the grand working of all things together in one harmonious whole that we must believe in ; all the little things of life ; the life and death of children, the rise and fall of nations, the blessings of peace, and the misery of war, all working for the human race the discipline we need, and tending to bring out in all the brightness of unfading splendour the glory of the Eternal Divinity.

In all prayer and supplication whether it be the voice of bodily pain, pleading for alleviation, or the outcry of a burdened spirit beneath a weary weight of mental anguish, we can never lose sight of the fact that the end of all things

earthly is plain and open before God ; we are often walking on the very verge of precipices which we cannot see, into which were we to fall we might lie at the bottom a helpless ruin. The vast combinations that baffle us ; the contradictions and misunderstandings that perplex us ; the clouds that hide the light ; the storms which seem to threaten us with shipwreck ; all these things can never impede the vision of one who is Infinite and Almighty, although they often rend the heart that is human, and that sighs for Heaven's help.

The Christian in thought and profession, gazing in admiration on the example of his Lord, feeling within him the sore need of some hand to lead him, some voice to cheer him in the midst of his continued conflict, blesses Heaven for the privilege of communion with his Father, clasps to his breast in fondest gratitude the comforting assurance of the brotherhood of Christ, and feels that to insinuate a doubt as to the efficacy of his penitent cry is the cruellest of all cruel wrongs ; an effort to take from him the greatest comfort of his lonely hours, and the purest incentive to a holy life ; an effort at once to shut out the light of Heaven, and render earth a dreary wilderness

full of wanderings and dangers, without the power to return to his home, or the hope of deliverance from the tyranny of his foes.

No one claims, as the province of human prayer, the sudden alteration of laws that are fixed ; of a will that is unchangeable. We do not expect to see the visible interference of angelic beings, legions of angels such as Christ had power to call, to stay the tide of cruelty rushing against His soul as the shadows of His coming death were beginning to deepen ; we do not now behold hands writing upon the wall, declaring the overthrow of kings and kingdoms, and the captivity and destruction of nations who bow before idols. The wicked may cry to a power above, believing with the faith of the devils who tremble ; cry for a stronger hand than theirs to ward off the coming evil, the pains that rack the body, the tortures that are driving them mad ; the criminal, in a fit of unholy remorse, may shed burning tears over the ruin of his life, as he moans and gasps in the wreck of every hope : these are not the prayers for whose efficacy we plead, for whose power we quote in confidence the promise of Christ : this is neither the asking, nor the seeking, nor the knocking, which claims

a ready response, which brings down the power to find, which opens the door that is closed; surely, in this, the kingdom of God is within each Christian heart that pleads in penitence; the answer is silent, coming like the dew of the morning, to refresh the weary, and impart fresh vigour to the flagging spirit. We do not look for a speedy answer to each hasty word in each unworthy petition: is the discipline nothing that bends the human will before the Divine, and teaches humility? Is the blessed influence of Communion with the God of purity, prompting us to shut out from the soul, in the hour of our converse, all that reminds us of earth; is all this no answer to the prayer that is uttered, even though the object demanded be withheld, and we learn to believe with loving earnestness that after all our Father has granted what most we needed.

Look at some poor mother, crushed in heart, by the bedside of her dying child, pleading almost with tears of blood, that her darling might be spared: fearing the sad, sad blank in her life, when she could answer no more its smile of love, nor clasp its little hands in hers: fearing the time when every object around her should recal its memory and renew her grief in all its

bitterness. Because the Father above has taken that little one to His own home shall we say that her prayers have been wasted, like the cries of animals sent out convulsively into empty space? Had the child lived, year by year it might have grown in sin, and yielded to the seduction of a world whose power to deprave is inexhaustible; till at the last the life for which she pleaded, and won back from the brink of the grave, might cast over her last hours the gloomy shadow of a mother's bitter apprehension for the safety of her child. A blessing surely above all price that it was transplanted to the garden of Paradise, ere it felt the blight of sin, the choking power of evil weeds: she had laid it to rest in sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life; she had resigned it into the hands of One Who is the emblem of all tenderness, Who is love itself; she had given it up to the Shepherd who is ever portrayed as carrying the lambs in His holy arms: and the discipline of prayer and resignation had wrought its work upon her own soul: it had taught her the true spirit of supplication, "Thy will, not mine, be done:" it had led her from the contemplation of earthly blessedness to that of Heavenly joy, and as her soul passed

away she could count upon a blissful re-union with her little one, feeling that she had received the truest answer to prayer, the fullest and most loving response—to the supplication of her once agonized heart.

And what of us, brethren, assembled here to-day, bearing our part in the praises of our Divine Master, and our testimony to the efficacy of Christian prayer? Many of us, doubtless, have to feel sad sometimes, as memory summons before us a blighted hope, once cherished fondly with all the ardour of human affection—now but a remembrance that brings us pain. We dare not rush too hastily to the conclusion that the realization of that hope would have added fresh sweetness to our cup, or made the sun of our life to glow with brighter and warmer rays. We must gather from the great sum of humanity's experience, and hearken to the voice of generations that are gone.

Many an old and weather-beaten Christian, his vision keener as he approached nearer to the separation, for a time, of soul and body, seeming to catch some beams of the light of the everlasting city, to which he felt himself approaching, has been able to thank Heaven for many a dis-

appointment, that seemed at the time cruel and unfatherly, tracing in it the evidence of Divine providence, the thoughtful solicitude of Divine love ; was it no answer to his prayer, that he had been denied the lesser for the greater blessing, now beholding in his clearer light the tenderness of the hand that once seemed to be pressing too heavily on his spirit? Let us turn, then, from the cavils and scepticism that would cast a doubt upon the noblest and most purifying of all Christian exercises, to the Bible doctrine as at once confirming the universal human instinct, and offering the only satisfying food to stay the hunger of the human soul.

There is placed before us on the day dedicated to St. Michael and all Angels, one of the grand incentives to a prayerful life, a glimpse of the world unseen, wherein pure beings are working for us, as they officiate as priests in the heavenly temple. It is no invention of superstition that peoples the infinite regions of the unseen world with innumerable and sinless beings, ever awaking the echoes of Heaven in Heavenly music, and ministering their angelic comfort to the struggling and tempted warriors in the Christian army. The ardour of Faith will turn into a

reality the vision of the lonely Jacob : the grand staircase of the outcast's dream, whereon the angels of God were ascending from earth to Heaven, and descending from Heaven to earth, becomes the real, living link between man and his Maker, the only means of our reconciliation, Jesus Christ, both man and God. Through Him are presented to us the countless hosts of Heaven, some with faces turned to God as in worship and adoration, some with their shining countenances bent downward, and their swift feet hastening to the earth, intent on the relief of sin-stricken and sorrowing men, "officiating spirits, sent forth on service in behalf of the heirs of salvation." In that wonderful book, the Revelation of S. John, which discloses to us a glimpse of the unseen world, lifting just enough of the curtain to strengthen our hopes, letting fall upon the earth just enough of Heaven's light to guide without dazzling, and to teach without inspiring dread ; we have the picture of an angel offering incense with the prayers of the saints upon the golden altar, which was before the throne ; the prayers of those who, in God's own good time, had cast aside the burden of mortality, still in their spirits giving utterance to the universal

instinct of all created beings, looking, perhaps, some of them, back to the earth they had left, unable even then to forget the souls that were knit to them by the ties of love, which the death of the body had been powerless to loosen ; praying earnestly for the wanderers, for the strengthening of the weak hands and feeble knees ; supplicating that those whom they had loved and known might join them in the vision of the King, standing side by side in the Kingdom.

The prayers, too, of all the penitent seekers after holiness, as their petitions went up for their own souls and all that were dear to them : the prayers of mothers and fathers for their children, of friends for friends, of brothers for brothers, the litanies and supplications of nations on their knees ; the words of children lisping the name of Christ ; the feeble ejaculation of the dying Christian just passing away : each and every prayer of the living and the dead, breathed in humility of heart and in lowliness of spirit, was united with the purifying incense of the ministering angel, and was laid in love upon the golden altar before the throne. And what was the incense with which was wafted into the presence of the King this great army of

prayers, coming from the living and dead ? Was it not the all prevailing sacrifice, the blood shed upon Calvary ? It is through Christ alone that we can approach unto the Father : into that presence we can only enter sprinkled with His blood : He takes us by the hand and leads us in. He offers up for us the poor, earth-bound prayer, which scarcely struggles upward from the heavy heart : joined to His intercession it mounts at once to Heaven. "The incense is His within the
"golden censer, and with that prevailing breath
"our creeping supplications mingle : 'He ever
"liveth to make intercession for us : ' and the
"intercession of the Eternal Son must lose its
"virtue ere the faintest whisper of the truly
"penitent heart can be too late, repulsed or forgotten by the God Whose Own Son bids us ask
"that we might have, seek that we might find,
"and knock that it might be opened unto us.
"His Holy Name be praised !"

SERMON V.

GETHSEMANE.

(PART I.)

JOHN XVIII. 1.

“When Jesus had spoken these words, He went forth with His disciples over the brook Kedron, where was a garden, into the which He entered, and His disciples.”

It is often profitable, during solemn seasons of religious meditation and discipline, to select one subject among the thousands that Revelation presents, and to concentrate for a time upon that our devout and prayerful thoughts, in order that our spiritual life may be deepened, and our often waning love rekindled into ardent vigour. And in this we but imitate many well-tried saints of old : many veterans in the service of holy contemplation who would for a time confine their thoughts to one single act or saying in our Saviour's life and history, and never relinquish

the study of it until they seemed to have gathered, at least, humanly speaking, all the lessons it was meant to teach.

How often, too, when thus pondering on Divine Truth in humble submission to the Spirit's guidance, how often must fresh beams of heavenly light have burst in upon their minds, bringing forth into the day almost unsuspected lessons of inestimable value to the Church of Christ ; lessons which have since proved to all struggling souls a blessing and encouragement in their efforts after perfection in the life of spiritual meditation. For, after all, the Christian must meditate ; devout contemplation is part of religious discipline : it is the inner, secret life of the soul, which is to bear its fruit a thousand-fold in deeds and words of Christ-like self-sacrifice and charity.

The subject introduced to us by the words of the text is so full of holy memories, and provides for the devout soul so much food for spiritual meditation, that I must divide my remarks upon it into two parts. In the first part, I propose, briefly and reverently, to dwell upon some few events immediately preceding our suffering Saviour's prayer in the garden ; in the

second part, to consider that holy prayer itself, and some among the many lessons it teaches with unfailing power. The very word Gethsemane presents to us a great and marvellous mystery, which it were an act of profanity to approach in any other spirit than that of reverent awe and humiliation. Never can we hope, while weighed down by the burden of the flesh, fully to understand the events of that night of agony : we may indeed contemplate in ardent devotion the sorrows of Jesus ; they must awaken within us a spirit of inextinguishable gratitude which might well lead us, if need be, to die for His sake ; but nevertheless they must in part remain a mystery until this earthly vision, through a glass, shall have given place to the brightness of heavenly knowledge. But to the believing and the penitent it is sweet even to touch the hem of the Saviour's garment, to touch it now in faith and love, the bright hope rising within us, as we gaze, that some day He will take us, like St. John, to rest upon his bosom.

“When Jesus had spoken these words, He
“went forth with His disciples over the brook
“Kedron, where was a garden into the which
“He entered and His disciples.” “When Jesus

“had spoken these words.” What words were they that preceded the crossing of the brook and the entry into the garden of His agony? They are words, my brethren, concerning which there can be but one verdict from united Christendom. Where all is beautiful and powerful, they seem clothed with a special beauty and gifted with a peculiar power; that parting discourse of our blessed Lord in the four preceding chapters of St. John’s Gospel, has been pronounced the very Holy of Holies of the sacred history; it is a wonderful legacy, from every line of which there shines forth the Divinity of Him who spake, though each syllable be tinged with the sadness of a soul that even now gazed full upon the agony in the garden, and bore in prospect the crown of thorns. “Who is there who peruses these solemn words
“whose heart does not burn within him at each
“expression of affection and sympathy? Who is
“there who does not recognize the impress of the
“Divine Nature in every sentence of that discourse, which while it announces to the disciples
“the sorrows of earth, at the same time pledges
“to them the aid and the joys of Heaven; that
“discourse, so commanding, while shaded with

“the gloom of human anguish, so sublime in its
“tenderness, so majestic in its repose?

“From this source still streams forth a light
“which illumines the Christian’s path and
“cheers him on his pilgrimage; and hence,
“too, if his trust be shaken, can he draw con-
“viction unclouded and serene. When difficul-
“ties embarrass the reason, and perplexities
“entangle the intellect—and who is that man
“over whose understanding doubt has not at
“times cast its shadow, or whose faith the stern
“realities of life have not put to the trial?—
“when difficulties and perplexities seem to hide
“the light the fainting soul will find its refuge
“in the words of this parting discourse; words
“which still whisper to our ear the same assur-
“ance that once supported the Apostle sinking
“in the wind-tossed sea, ‘Let not your heart
“be troubled, ye believe in God, believe also
“in Me.’” “When Jesus had spoken these
“words, He went forth with His disciples
“over the brook Kedron.”

We cannot fail to notice how the early Fathers
of the Church in their ardent devotion which puts
the colder love of many of us to shame; how
they love to linger over every spot of earth upon

which He trod ; to hold as consecrated for ever every mountain on which He prayed or taught, every little village through which He passed in His pilgrimage of suffering love. And indeed the names of places which fix the scene of some Divine act accomplished, are the "material setting" which naturally attracts the interest and lives in the memories of all devout souls. Thus the fact that Jesus on the night of His agony, passed over the brook Kedron, gives to that mountain stream a livelier interest and a greater beauty than any which could have been imparted solely by "inanimate and irrational nature."

Moreover, there is contained in the announcement a lesson in the Divine fitness of all the details of that plan which led the Holy Jesus from Bethlehem to Calvary. It was over this very brook, a thousand years before, that king David passed with his sorrowing companions as he fled from treachery and betrayal. With "head covered and unsandalled feet," his retinue manifesting every sign of profound grief, King David, the type and ancestor of Christ, ascended the slopes of Olivet, betrayed by his own familiar friend, who had sat at his table, and received

every manifestation of his fatherly love and care ; betrayed, and pursued by Absalom, his own son, whose treachery reminds us of the dark deed which has branded with everlasting shame the name of the traitor Judas.

Over the brook then and up the slope of Olivet passed Jesus and the eleven. "To one "who has visited the scene at that very season," writes a modern traveller, "to one who has "visited the scene at that very season of the "year, and at that very hour of the night, who "has felt the solemn hush of the silence even "at this short distance from the city wall—who "has seen the deep shadows flung by the great "boles of the ancient Olive trees, and the "chequered light that falls on the sward "through their moonlight silvered leaves, it is "more easy to realize the awe which crept over "these few Galileans, as in almost unbroken "silence, with something perhaps of secrecy, "and with a weight of mysterious dread brooding over their spirits, they followed Him who "with bowed head and sorrowing heart walked "before them to His willing doom."

Already during that memorable walk to the garden, already were gathering thick and fast,

the shadows of that crisis which was to try his human soul to the uttermost ; yet still the great ruling passion of His human life seemed uppermost and strongest ; that inimitable love and sympathy with all wandering sheep whom He longed to gather, as a tender shepherd, within the everlasting fold. He perceived already the signs of that base desertion and cowardice so soon to break forth in all its bitter reality. Then saith Jesus unto them, "All ye shall be "offended because of me this night : for it is "written, I will smite the shepherd and the "sheep shall be scattered abroad."

Oh ! who can dwell reverently upon this wondrous scene without the keenest distrust in all that is earthly and merely human, without the liveliest suspicion of the strongest resolutions of our wayward and fickle hearts—to-day animated with love, to-morrow cold and faithless as a stone. Those eleven men, vowing eternal friendship in the path to Gethsemane, declaring that not even death could cool their ardour or separate them from the object of their love ; those eleven men stand prominently before us as a warning to each member of the struggling Church ! How often, since then, has the heart

of Jesus been pained as He has listened to protestations of devotion and vows of fidelity which were soon to be scattered into air, as He has beheld us disgrace the banner of His Cross beneath which we are sworn to fight.

Into the garden now they pass, Jesus and the eleven ; it was doubtless the place which had often witnessed before our Lord's evening meditation and prayer as He sought for strength for the struggles of the coming day.

The fact that He thus sought solitude here, or on some neighbouring mountain top, reveals to us with deepest pathos the lowliness and poverty of His chosen lot. What a subject for contemplation for those whose hearts are wedded to modern luxuries, who sigh and murmur as the slight inconveniences of life disturb their ease ; what a subject for contemplation that though "the foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, yet the Son of Man had not where to lay His head."

It is not surprising that devoted men, in all ages of the Church's history, should have tried to identify the spot which was the scene of this mysterious midnight tragedy ; it is not surprising, for all of us know with what fondness th

loving human heart will cherish the smallest relic which speaks to us of one who is gone, for whom we entertained an ardent affection which the grave can never destroy. What wonder that the scene of that ineffable agony should have been sought by multitudes of Christian disciples as a place likely to beget high and holy meditations, and to kindle the soul into a very enthusiasm of worship. And yet the fact remains that we cannot be certain of the exact spot where Jesus began to be sorrowful and very heavy. Gethsemane itself which preaches to us of the burden of our sins borne far away ; of peace won for us and pledged to us by the Saviour's struggle and victory ; Gethsemane itself has been the subject of bitter controversy and the theme of unseemly dispute. The Latin Church has, in modern days, gained entire possession of the traditional site ; enclosed it with a wall and planted it with trees ; while the Greek Church, not to be outdone by her rival, has invented another spot farther north for which she claims all the sanctity and reverence which belong to the real scene of our Saviour's woe.

But while human passions desecrate the Holy of Holies : surely the loving and faithful heart

can discover the hand of mercy which thus hides from us the consecrated spot; we are all too prone to rely upon the things we can touch and see; men might have been led to believe that the mere earth upon which once fell those drops of bloody sweat might have possessed a charm to banish evil and ensure abiding triumph over Satan's wiles; ignoring the reality of a life-long struggle and the eventual victory of undying faith. "The real virtue and propitiation are in the sufferings beneath the Paschal moon nearly two thousand years ago, not in modern pilgrimages to the Olive trees of Gethsemane."

The announcement that Gethsemane was a garden conveys to us, if we will accept it, an instructive lesson. Our thoughts naturally revert to the earliest pages of Divine Revelation, wherein is presented to us the picture of a garden of beauty and of plenty—the home of our first parents, who were endued with all the attributes that the Christian sighs for and longs after—the perfection of innocence, purity, and love—the Divine image in which they were created. As that image was marred and spoiled in the garden of Eden, in the person of the first Adam, so in the

garden of Gethsemane took place that beginning of sorrows by which its restoration was triumphantly completed by Jesus, the second Adam. As in the garden of Eden was pronounced the sentence of banishment and death, so in the garden of Gethsemane commenced that bitter agony which restores us to the Father's presence and snatches victory from the grave. Reflections like these serve to fix immutably in the devout mind the inspiration and unity of the Old Testament and the New ; they place before us Moses and the prophets in the purest harmony with the life and teaching of Him Who rose from the dead ; the prayerful student is led on from truth to truth in peaceful confidence which banishes for ever the unholy impertinence of modern scepticism ; he beholds in the Lamb of God, who taketh away the sins of the world, the great centre around which cluster all inspired history and inspired prophecy, and with multiplied evidence convincing him in the midst of all his sorrows and infirmities, he thankfully cries, " Lord, I believe, help thou mine unbelief."

I leave this subject for the present, reserving for another occasion the consideration of our Master's prayer. Jesus and the eleven are

together now in the garden : He is to suffer, to
wrestle and to conquer ; they alas ! are to desert
their truest friend in the hour of His need.
May our hearts be true for ever to His cause :
may we be preserved from every disloyal thought
by the virtue of that midnight agony so bravely
borne by the Sinless and Divine Sufferer !

GETHSEMANE.

(PART II.)

JOHN XVIII. 1.

“When Jesus had spoken these words, He went forth with His disciples over the brook Kedron, where was a garden, into the which He entered, and His disciples.”

IN our last brief and partial consideration of the subject introduced by these words, I placed before you some few events immediately preceding our Saviour's prayer. Now we have come to the time when the shadows of the Great Agony were indeed deepening and darkening around our suffering Lord. May the contemplation of His sufferings touch us to the very quick, as we stand convicted before God of having done our part in the mixing of that cup of woe.

“Then Jesus saith unto the disciples, Sit ye here while I go and pray yonder. And He took with Him Peter, and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be sorrowful and very

"heavy." With words like these before us, which confess the necessity that even Jesus should pray, we surely cannot be in danger of forgetting that He was really and truly man. The mystery of the Incarnation I do not ask to fathom, but I recognise in it a revelation of surpassing comfort which insures to all members of His body an exaltation beyond human imagination. The revealed and historic truth that Jesus was our brother touches the very heart of our inner life: it is by His manhood that He places Himself in contact with us, and so becomes the mediator between God and man: in His veritable manhood rests the virtue of His human example, His genuine sympathy, His agonising and world-redeeming death: it is the touch of nature which makes Him, most holy as He is, in very deed, kin with us. We need not seek for logical definitions which shall compel our reason to assent to the possibility of that mystical union which thus made God and man one Christ; that God is omnipotent, renders it possible; that He has declared it renders it immutably true, and this is the Catholic faith, which, except a man believe faithfully, he cannot be safe. This is not merely the dogmatic

assertion of the Christian Church ; it is the sorrowful warning of Him who " in the days of " His flesh offered up prayers and supplications " with strong crying and tears."

As Jesus went to pray He chose three, the elect of the elect, to be witnesses of His struggle, leaving the majority behind. Cannot we recognize in this the gentlest consideration for human weaknesses, a genuine sympathy with all human infirmities. The remaining eight disciples had not been educated for the sight of appalling woe ; to St. Peter, St. James, and St. John, had been accorded higher privileges which rendered them more fitted to be companions of " the hour " that was coming. Had they learned their lesson aright ? They had beheld Moses and Elias on the Mount of Transfiguration. Had this deeply impressed them with the never-varying harmony between the Law, the Prophets, and the Gospel, helping them to behold in the Jesus of the Gospel the Messiah of Israel's prophets ? They had been admitted within the chamber where lay the dead maiden, whom their Master summoned to life before them : had this extra proof of Divine power and tender affection kindled in them a

corresponding devotion which would nerve them to watch as He poured forth His soul in prayer? Oh! who can tell how much His manhood counted on the sympathy of those chosen three! His divine knowledge of all human character must have presented to him the fact that their hearts were capable of heroism and utter self-renunciation; there was that within them, even in the hour of their failure, which was capable of being moulded into the martyr spirit of bravery and endurance in the cause of a friend, and doubtless their very presence and the knowledge that, after all, they really loved Him, imparted somewhat of comfort in that lonely hour. And here we may reverently offer our imperfect sympathy with the sorrowing Jesus. Who, in the time of bitter trial and bereavement, has not felt the blessing of a friendly hand to grasp, the blessing of a kindred soul to whom we can pour out the grief that is bearing us down; how many too have felt the bitterness of desolation and utter loneliness as affliction has cast its shadow on their life; having those about them and beside them incapable of comprehending the cause of their tears; utterly, yes, utterly alone in the very midst of throbbing human life?

“Then saith He unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful even unto death; tarry ye here and watch with me.” This sorrow that was now casting its heavy weight upon His sinless soul was no mere dread of coming death; it was not the vision of the Cross nor the prospect of the crown of thorns; it could not have been the taunts of the wicked crowd nor the desertion even of those chosen three. No! the fear of death or persecution or desertion could not thus have weighed down the soul of such a hero; in after years, His own martyrs walked bravely to death and torture, trusting in His promises and believing in His name; old men and trembling boys, and tender maidens rejoiced in the day that found them worthy to die for His sake. The anguish of Jesus was something above and beyond anything that they could have suffered; it was something that a sinner could never undergo, that sinful humanity can never fully comprehend. It was something far deadlier than death. “It was the burden and the mystery of the world’s sin that lay heavy on His heart; it was the tasting in the Divine humanity of a sinless life, the bitter cup which sin had poisoned; it was to

“experience in the bosom of perfect innocence
“and perfect love all that was detestable in
“human ingratitude, all that was pestilent in
“human hypocrisy, all that was cruel in human
“rage.”

We can now imagine all the powers of evil gathered together for one last attack. Satan's open temptations in the wilderness were doubtless renewed in seductive whispers to cast off the yoke and be free. Why should Jesus Christ bear the burden of other men's iniquities in this bitter, bitter anguish of spirit! Like a skilful general Satan will bring all his forces to bear upon the soul at the weakest points in the weakest hour.

How often with us, in the hour of some bitter trial, when some coveted and cherished blessing is torn from us in chastisement, how often does he suggest rebellion against the God of Love, and range before us in the most seductive form the most pleasing of infidelity's doctrines. Why not cast off this yoke of bondage! Better to believe nothing, to hope for nothing, to pray for nothing, than to have one's faith tried sorely and shaken cruelly, one's hopes crushed, one's prayers disregarded and despised!

But what can He give us in exchange? Is there any comfort in the belief in an iron destiny holding us in a firm grip, leading us on without one chance of turning back? What can supply the place of the Christian's belief in the Christian's sacrifice? Where is the substitute for the Christian's hope of glory, the sense of spiritual communion with the Godhead in the hour of earnest prayer? In all the different creeds and phases of faith that have influenced men and women in the great struggle of life, albeit many of them have had their share of beauty and of comfort; there is not one that can meet all the wants of the struggling soul: there is not one that can comfort and cheer and strengthen like the religion of Jesus Christ, who taught us how to pray in the garden of Gethsemane.

What a picture is presented to us in that garden of His Agony! Utterly and miserably alone! True, there were those close by who had sworn to be His friends; but how miserably they failed! They had no sympathy with His trials and His tears, no comprehension of that inner life which sustained Him in the struggle.

Jesus withdrew about a stone's cast from His

faithless, unsympathizing friends, and kneeled down and prayed. Only a stone's cast. We may not go too far off, nor forsake them altogether. We must return to minister to their wants, when our prayer and communion are over; we must return to our work, with nerves braced and spirit strengthened for the conflict.

Father, if thou be willing! Oh, thou of whom alone I am, neither made nor created, but begotten before the worlds, one with Thee, of Thine own eternal substance; equal to Thee as touching the Godhead, but inferior to Thee as touching my Manhood beneath the burden of which I now cry unto Thee in agony, Father if Thou be willing remove this cup from me! If it be possible, that any other sacrifice can restore fallen humanity to Thy lost favour—if it be possible that anything else but my bitter agony can remove the flaming sword from the gate of Paradise; if it be possible that any other means but my pain can restore the faded image of our Godhead to the children whom we love: if it be possible that any other means can prepare those many mansions of Thy House, for the myriads who must live eternally; "Then, Father, if Thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless

“not my will but Thine be done.” Here is the self-sacrifice which is the very essence of all prevailing prayer. He would not move, or forsake His arm who was holding Him up. He stilled all the wild longings of His human nature, which sighed for peace and rest. His one great object was the realization and completion of His Father’s will; the carrying out fully of that plan of Redemption which had been formed long ago by the Council of the Trinity. Who can say that this earnest prayer of Jesus Christ in the Garden was not answered with the freest, fullest shower of Heavenly blessings? An angel descended with fresh tokens of His Father’s love: strength was borne to Him by angel hands, strength which enabled Him in still greater agony to cast Himself again in fullest confidence upon His Father’s protection: strength which enabled Him to answer nothing as His cruel tormentors heaped upon Him insult and degradation, which enabled Him to bear His Cross, and still be faithful through the hiding of his Father’s face, and, when the cup of His woe was full to overflowing, to pray for the authors of His misery that they might benefit, after penitence and amendment, by the very

deed which their cruelty had accomplished.

As we are wandering now far from home, surrounded by a thousand dangers ; if we would hold pure, strength-imparting communion with our Father we must approach nearer and nearer to the spirit of self-surrender, self-renunciation, which was the very essence of our Saviour's petition in the garden of His agony. If spiritual difficulties beset us, as they often will, and there come between us and the light of Heaven a dark cloud obscuring the Divine Face of the Father, still must we lie down beneath His Hand, saying from the heart, "Thy will be done." If those we love are taken from us, denied us now for a time ; if we can find in those from whom we seek it most, if we can find no sympathy or fellow feeling entering into our plans and aspirations, and we feel ourselves alone, even though surrounded outwardly by scores of our kith and our kin, still is the true prayer that of Jesus in the Garden, "Father, "if Thou be willing." If we have to lay down one by one all the cherished plans of our life : if after glorying in health and strength, we are compelled to yield to the power of unceasing weakness : if our gifts and talents leave us one

by one, taken away altogether, or impaired and lessened by slow degrees, still must our prayer be that of Jesus in the Garden, "Father, if it "be possible!" It is not possible but that God should will us to be saved for ever: that no penitent should be too late: that our souls, with all the other members of the bride of Christ, should be presented pure and spotless at the last. How can they be without passing through the discipline? How can they be without treading in the footsteps of our great Example; "where He trod we must set our "steps?" He has His martyrs now: martyrs to the ills of daily life and the pains of the body, but He is their beacon light as of old. "To the "wrestlings and strivings of the lonely heart He "imparts the virtue of His midnight agony." And as we bow before the will of the Father, the angel comes with the strength which strengthened Jesus.

SERMON VI.

JUDAS THE BETRAYER.

ST. MAT XXVII. part of v. 4.

“I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood.”

It is with feelings of unrestrainable awe that we contemplate the existence of a man like Judas, placed by common consent upon the pinnacle of infamy, the emblem of all that virtue condemns and honour despises. He is such an awful wonder that the very possibility of his existence has perplexed many an intellect and shaken many a faith not resting firmly on the goodness of our Heavenly Father. Those who believe in the cruel creed of an inevitable destiny, forcing without mercy, and paining without discipline : taking human souls firmly within its grasp and compelling them to pass on through this world of the flesh, without the power of their own free will : such, indeed, may behold in Judas

wretched example of their own merciless theory—a man born to embezzle, and driven, without option, to betray.

Cruellest and hardest of all cruel creeds ! It cuts from beneath our feet every foundation of our faith : it darkens the sun in the heavens by the presence of a perpetual cloud ; it takes the virtue from every good deed and the guilt from every dark crime ; it places side by side the saint and the sinner, the one without honour, the other without blame ; it stifles every cry for mercy, every longing after better things ; it banishes for ever from the human heart the now cherished principle of love which alone can feed its cravings and satisfy its earnest longings. Without the aid of Heaven's Revelation we can refute so debasing a belief by an appeal to the dignity and nobility of the human soul, which it strives to trample underfoot. The noble consciousness within us of the power to choose the good and reject the evil ; the quick beating of every human heart moved to pity at the sight of woe, to indignation at the sight of wrong ; the love that binds heart to heart and clasps hand in hand, and is our truest sunshine in a world of gloom ; the ardent craving for something to

worship, something to reverence, present in the breast of the savage in the woods ; the witness of honest souls standing upon the brink of two worlds and feeling the world of sense slipping from beneath their feet, conscious, as they were going, that no cruel destiny was hurrying them to desolation ; the virtuous lives of many now living with pure hearts and longing hereafter for a vision of their God ; all these facts unanswerable by all the logic the fatalist can heap up against them, convince us that we have a Father in Heaven who is bringing us home, more ready to hear than we to pray, not forcing His children in cruel tyranny, but leading them with the cords of love.

There are, alas ! in these our days of imperfection, many, many things concerning which we have good cause to doubt. We have often to doubt the vow of a brother man, given to us under the seal of what professes to be pure friendship. We have often to doubt the earnest protestations of apparently sincere hearts as "time's rude hand" cools their ardour and banishes their enthusiasm. We have often to doubt the sincerity of vows pledged at the altar of God, when the heart was bowing before the shrine of Mam-

mon. We have sometimes to doubt a father's and a mother's love, a brother's and a sister's sincerity; but if there be any truth in God's Revelation, if there be any reality in the life and death of Jesus Christ, we have no more cause to doubt our Father's offer of Salvation, and our own power to grasp it, than we have cause to doubt, that, as surely as we are living now, some day our life blood will cease to flow, and we shall lie down side by side with those who have gone before.

To say then that Judas was a mere puppet in the hands of destiny, a brainless machine under the inexorable power of a cruel fate: this is at once to place him below and beyond all the conditions of humanity; for to take from anyone the responsibilities of manhood would be to reduce him to the level of the beasts that perish. All the learned treatises of all the learned sceptics, filled with the profoundest logic, can never overturn the confident conviction of the great majority of our race, that we have a will—that we can run down the deep descent to depravity and degradation, or by God the Holy Spirit's aid, soar heavenwards in the paths of virtue.

Every Christian congregation assembled in a

Christian Church summons before the imagination the founders of the early Church, assembled to worship, with Jesus Christ the Righteous, their Way, their Truth, and their Life; those first chosen twelve had all the outward seal and sign of the Master's true disciples; there were amongst them martyrs and confessors and warriors whose heroism and self-denial are now the wonder of us all; the outside world could probably discern no difference in their zeal, nor tax any with a lack of enthusiasm; they doubtless seemed all earnest enough in their Master's cause, and eloquent in preparing His way. Those who were true as steel, had, at first, no knowledge that there was one amongst them over whom there hung a heavy cloud; that one of their mystic number was to forget his birth-right and trample on his banner; concerning whom the Master's own lips proclaimed the warning, "Have not I chosen you twelve and "one of you is a devil."

Judas fell, step by step, as all men fall, and sunk as all men sink: there, surely, was no supernatural power brought to bear upon his human will, to force him to execute a plan fore-ordained for the world's redemption. He surely

was no necessity in Calvary's sacrifice : his unholy blood was no propitiation before God for our sins ; his self-inflicted death no incense well pleasing in the sight of Heaven.

While I have reason and Revelation, the one to judge, the other to guide the judgment, I can never believe that any man was born to suffer the punishment of the lost, whom no prayers and no tears, uttered and poured forth from the hour of his birth, could ever rescue from ruin. Such a belief would turn into a cruel mockery all the pressing, loving invitations of Christ's imperishable Gospel.

When next I stand at the altar, and we commemorate that scene upon Calvary, which, humanly speaking, Judas helped to accomplish, it will be mine, as a priest of Christ's Church, to read that loving, plaintive, world-wide invitation, given in our Saviour's own comfortable words, "Come unto Me all that travail and are heavy laden, and I will refresh you. So God loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son, to the end that all that believe in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." I could not read these words to our Master's flock did hold that any man was excluded from the

gracious promise ; that any soul having heard the voice, could never by supplication and mercy, gain the power to obey and the blessedness to come.

It is the great glory of the Gospel, the thing of all others that gladdens the hearts of Heaven's ambassadors, that the message is universal, to be proclaimed wherever the life blood is flowing and the pulse is beating. There may be now in the world men as capable of sinking low into ungodliness as Judas the betrayer, whom, without the shadow of doubt, the Gospel of Christ has the power to soften and reclaim ; there are already instances enough in the history of the world's conversion of stony hearts turned to flesh, and stubborn wills bent and conquered before the power of the Cross of Jesus.

I believe that Judas might have been saved if he would ; what though a whole flood of prophecy pointed to his execrable deed and swiftly following punishment ; what though the voice of inspiration, years before, spoke of his children being fatherless, and his wife a widow, and his office of disciple torn from his grasp and given to another ; what was all this but the utterance of God's universal fore-knowledge which had no

more influence on the soul of Judas than a gentle evening breeze upon the rocks that line the shore ?

In God's ineffable wisdom, of which the human mind is incapable of judging, in that wisdom which of necessity must embrace the knowledge of all things past, present, and to come, He must have known that a man should some day arise, born of woman, and nurtured by a woman's love, who should sink step by step in moral degradation, and at last perform the deed of a covetous coward, concerning which our Lord declared that it had been better for that man had he never been born. Not indeed better had he striven to recognize the object of his birth and the dignity of his calling ; not better had his eye caught the radiancy of that light that was shining around him ; not better had his ear been willing to listen to the tones of his Master's voice, and catch the notes of heavenly music sung by angels over his Redeemer's birth ; it would have been better for him never to have been born only because he closed his eyes to the light that was shining around, and his ears to the tones of that voice, and the notes of that music, which had the power, if he had had the will, to

lead him heavenward to our Father's home.

You will remember that St. Paul, in the Epistle to the Romans, glories in the steadfastness of the union that bound him to Christ. In the catalogue of those things which had not the power to separate him from his Master's love, he leaves out that which was the ruin of Judas, and may be the ruin of any man living. "I am persuaded," he says, "that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." Not death with all its terrors, its sad partings and bitter memories; not life with all its countless temptations and inducements to the butterfly existence of an irresponsible being; not evil angels with their thousand and one voices, colouring, seducing, enticing: not anything that God has created external to the human soul; but there is one thing that can tear us from the love of our Master, and leave hopeless and rudderless, like a bark stranded on a rocky shore; it is our own resistless tide of passion and of crime, yielded to, cherished, worshipped:

our own souls verily commit suicide : they seal their own deaths : the soul itself, by its own power of free will, can accomplish what is impossible to death and life, and angels, and leave us, like Judas, to mourn fruitlessly over our ever present guilt, our betrayal of innocent blood.

It may be easily supposed, that, concerning the character of Judas, the centre-piece of infamy, there have been many conjectures, some the result of scepticism, extending to every separate portion of God's Revelation ; some the offspring of a poetic mind, inventing and colouring by a powerful imagination. But there is one thought concerning the infancy of Judas, given to the world through the sad vision of a sacred poet, which it would be as well to notice here.

The poet Keble, than whom no man is more revered among the members of our Church, whose life bore witness to the sincerity of his teaching, and was in harmony with the beauty of his verse : Keble portrays the infancy of Judas as utterly devoid of all those helps from Heaven which we love to picture around the cradle of our young. He suggests, in his utter

detestation of the betrayer of the Lord he loved, and for whom he earnestly toiled, that no kindly star looked down upon the babe that was born, no angel had charge of his infant years. I can easily imagine that a man like Keble, with his fervent faith, his earnest work, his inimitable simplicity, could almost banish from his mind the idea of the betrayer's humanity, believing that any one who could thus violate all the laws of Heaven and of earth, must of necessity belong to Satan's unhappy host. But I cannot lose sight of the fact that Judas was a man; born into the world with a man's responsibilities and a man's temptations. I would rather believe that all the aid which Heaven grants to struggling souls was doubled here to save a soul rushing headlong to ruin; that, if it be God's will that guardian angels should hover around our cradle and watch with jealousy the young, as day by day they increase in stature and in knowledge; around his infancy were angels of tried solicitude and care, that, if it were possible, they might whisper some thought, implant some virtuous germ, which growing hereafter to maturity, might rescue him from his self-sought ruin, and turn the would-be-

devil into an angel of light. It is possible that all their efforts may have failed, that all their toil was wasted on the barren soil.

Here comes in strongly the argument from analogy which reason suggests when seeking to discover the plans and purposes of Heaven. How often have we seen a young man start in life, with good ability and fair promise, aided by the prayers and example of those who love him, and have committed him to the care of the Father in whom they trust, go forth into the world armed with the teaching of a creed instilling the reverence of honour and of virtue, the beauty of holiness ; how often have we seen such a one slide downwards by imperceptible degrees, ever resolving to be better, ever forgetting his resolution. And all the time that he has been slipping away from the teaching of the Saviour, and the world and the flesh and the devil have been strengthening their hold upon his fickle soul, fond hearts at home have been besieging Heaven with sincere petitions to save him from impending ruin. One by one the thoughts of his early faith have faded into oblivion, until at length, a perfect wreck in mind and body, he comes home to die, and his soul passes away, insensible to every-

thing that could render his journey to another world a comfort to those who have to mourn his loss. Thank God for the inestimable power and the blessing of the prayers of the loving and the ministry of angels ; but, alas ! these even may fail before a stubborn will and an hardened heart.

What is the whole history of the Jewish world but a pleading, earnest and plaintive, a pleading of the Almighty and His prophets with a rebellious and hard-hearted people : instance after instance of forgiving and forgetting ; striving after striving to lead them back to the path from which they had strayed ; entreaty after entreaty not to close their eyes to their own salvation, to take refuge in the fold with the sheep that were safe ?

This is the picture which the Gospel presents of the earnest purpose of God that all men should be saved. The unequivocal joy over the returning prodigal, the rejoicing over the restoration of the lost sheep to the fold from which it had wandered, all the beautiful parables, earthly stories with a heavenly meaning, all teach the same lesson of Heaven's forbearance, of the toil of angels to save us from woe.

With this example of wilful ruin before us, written in the record that never lies, we may well seek the only refuge that is safe, the only arm that is Divine. Behold Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, with outstretched hands, all pierced with the cruel nails, behold Him pleading with us for the safety of our own sin-stained souls. His voice comes to us over the lapse of ages, reproaching His children with dishonour to His words. Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by, is it nothing, all that sad and lonely life, that bitter, painful death?

Let the young come in all the vigour of health and strength, and dedicate their life to His service; let the old come, in penitence for the past, and in hope of His Presence by their dying bed; let all come in faith, lest the recording angel write it in the great book, and they die ere it can be blotted out again, that they have cast in their lot with Judas, that they have betrayed innocent blood. To-day it cannot be too late, if there be faith, and penitence, and resignation to God's holy will; to-morrow who can tell if his bodily eyes shall see the light?

SERMON VII.

THOU ART THE MAN!

2 SAMUEL XII. part of v. 7.

"And Nathan said to David, Thou art the man."

THESE memorable words introduce us into the midst of a wonderful scene in David's palace of cedars in the City of Zion. There was a cloud over the mighty conqueror: the dauntless soldier, the gifted poet, the romantic friend, was not the man to be happy when a deed of cruelty and bloodshed had cut him off from communication with the God of his heart. He might, indeed, have tried to be happy, to forget his iniquity in the magnificence of his royalty, and in the freely offered homage of his multitudes of willing followers: he might have tried to coax from his lyre, by the aid of those cunning fingers which soothed the turbulent soul of Saul, some melody to stay the apprehensions of his own disquieted

spirit: but David was too great a hero, too noble a man to feel entirely at his ease when the springs of spiritual life were cut off, and the purest cravings of his soul could not be satisfied. It is not necessary now to dwell upon the nature and extent of his transgression: we all know what he did: he had wilfully exposed his gallant soldier, Uriah, to the arrows of the Ammonite archers, and when thus he had compassed his death, he took his widow to wife, whom before, in defiance of God's law, he had sinfully loved.

From the schools of the prophets, where he had been trained to speak fearlessly for God, came forth the undaunted and divinely commissioned Nathan. It was his mission to reprove sin, even though committed by the first and greatest man, in the first and greatest of empires. And here comes in the lesson, sorely forgotten in these days of refinement and pleasant speaking, that the messengers of God are to rebuke the violation of their Master's laws in the palaces of kings as well as in the cottages of the humble. Their mission is to the whole world. They are to be dismayed by no power, hindered by no threats, bribed by no promises.

The pure, unvarnished tale of the Gospel, God's anger against sin, and the precious atonement of the Cross of Christ for all penitent sinners, must be the burden of their message, bravely and without flinching to be proclaimed wherever there is a soul that might be lost, but which Emmanuel came to save, and to crown with glory and honour. In these days of accumulated wealth—wealth which is sometimes tacitly acknowledged to be a seemly cloak for well known sins—we need men with the courage of the prophets of old, trained to be speakers for the great King—

“ Ill fares the land, to hastening ills a prey,
Where wealth accumulates, and men decay.”

Fearlessly Nathan the prophet came into the presence of the King, and fearlessly proclaimed his message, uttering one of the simplest and most beautiful parables in the Bible. “ There were
“ two men in one city : the one rich, and the
“ other poor. The rich man had exceeding many
“ flocks and herds, but the poor man had nothing,
“ save one little ewe lamb, which he had bought
“ and nourished up : and it grew up together
“ with him and with his children : it did eat c

“his own meat, and drank of his own cup, and lay
“in his bosom, and was unto him as a daughter.
“And there came a traveller unto the rich man,
“and he spared to take of his own flock, and of
“his own herd, to dress for the wayfaring man
“that was come unto him, but took the poor
“man’s lamb, and dressed it for the man that
“was come to him.”

The king was thus taken off his guard: this tale of mean and cowardly oppression raised his anger and indignation to the pitch of fury. The picture is a grand one, true in every line to human nature. The victorious and large-hearted soldier, actuated in theory by the truest notions of honour, saw in the man who had done this deed an unmanly coward, unworthy of life. He said to Nathan, “As the Lord liveth, the man that hath
“done this thing shall surely die, and he shall
“restore the lamb four-fold, because he did this
“thing, and because he had no pity.” David had forgotten himself and his own sin: his thoughts flew at once to some imaginary monster among his own subjects, whose crime he would instantly avenge, for whose theft he would compel the fullest compensation. But stay a moment, the king is too secure, his memory is

weak; like an arrow shot home to the mark, sharp and sudden came the answer of the prophet, "Thou art the man!"

Then followed quickly the history of his sin, robbed of all its romance, bare and naked as it appeared in the eyes of a pure God. He had been taken from the sheepfolds to be anointed king over the chosen people of Jehovah; he had been persecuted by his relentless enemies, but his Father in Heaven had remembered David and all his troubles, and the arm of His might had delivered him out of all and given him peace. He was rich in flocks and herds, living in a palace, with thousands coming and going at his call; earthly blessings without number were his, and God would even have given him more, and yet he was not satisfied. There came a traveller to this rich man—some evil spirit, some godless passion, some dark whisper of the devil wandering over the face of the earth seeking whom he might devour. And David opened the door of his heart, and admitted within this destroyer of his peace, which led him on to commit the deed of shame and of blood. This evil guest could be satisfied by no common feast: he had come from the regions

of darkness and unholiness and must be honoured with a banquet of sin. So David listened to his evil passion, and committed that dark deed which has left a stain upon his name, recorded by the Spirit of holiness as a sad warning to all those whose lust is leading them to ruin.

But the prophet's message is not yet complete. He must pronounce the sentence of the Almighty, the judgment that tracks the footsteps of the sinner. As David had done unto his neighbour, so should it be done to him again. The rights he had violated, the vows he had broken, the office he had disgraced, were all crying for vengeance, and from that very hour began to be fulfilled in his own house the sure promise of the offended Judge, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, saith the Lord."

Then follows one of the most beautiful traits in the character of the shepherd King. He met the messenger of his God with no indignant remonstrance, no dignified appeal to his royal prerogative, no obstinate rebellion. The teaching of the prophet had gone home to his heart, and as his guilt stood out plainly before his eyes, there came into his inmost being a longing for a purer life, together with the spirit of humble

penitence and sincere confession: "David said
"unto Nathan, I have sinned against the Lord."

There have been many in the world who have delighted to contemplate the transgressions of "the man after God's own heart," and to hold him up as a justification of their own sins. But where is their repentance, their confession, their humiliation, their strong resolve of atonement and amendment of life? Let them remember how David humbled himself in dust and ashes, and fell upon his face, seeking forgiveness from the Father he had offended. Entrapped by the snares of the Devil and the weakness of the flesh, he fell as other men fall; but no sooner were his eyes opened so that he could plainly see the wrong he had done, than he felt all the ingratitude of his conduct, and returned earnestly to his God. Repentance and godly sorrow for every sin he committed sigh plaintively all through those matchless songs, the outpouring of his own contrite heart, which even now find an echo in the breast of every Christian. This is the spirit that prompted him, as he looked back upon his young life, stained by so many blots, to exclaim, in the true spirit of penitence, "Remember not the sins of my youth." His

was "the struggle of an earnest human soul
"towards what is good and best ; a struggle
"often sorely baffled, yet never ended : ever with
"tears, repentance, true unconquerable purpose,
"begun anew."

Like the voice of the prophet speaking by divine commission to the guilty king, is the voice of each sinner's conscience, reproving, warning and declaring the inevitable vengeance against sin unrepented of and unforgiven. I doubt if any heavier punishment for sin can be inflicted upon any man on earth than a conscience burdened sorely with a sense of guilt. We have read of murderers escaping for a time from the vengeance of human laws followed about by the fearful memory of their dark deeds, and unable to rest ; an avenger seemed for ever at their heels tracking them to death ; unbidden forms seemed to rise from out of the earth—spectres beckoning them they knew not whither. In the still hours of the night, instead of refreshing sleep, there came the hideous visions of guilt, the forms of the slain, all stained with blood, rising from their graves, and sending a fearful agony through every fibre of their wasting frames. And from this there seemed no escape ;

they might travel through the world, and leave the scene of guilt far behind, but with them seemed to go the voices and the visions; they beheld an accusation in every fresh face, a cause for trembling in every new sound. The words which the greatest poet of England puts into the mouth of the wicked King Richard III., the night before his death, found for them a terrible realization—

“ My conscience has a thousand several tongues,
And every tongue brings in a several tale,
And every tale condemns me for a villain.”

And to those who are fighting the Christian fight, and running the Christian race, “looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith,” does conscience speak with unmistakable power.

The Holy Apostle, St. John, says, “If we say “that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and “the truth is not in us.” Who can look into his heart and say it? Who can look upon his life and think it? Who can look upon the Cross with the bleeding form of Christ and feel it? There have been many so called holy men upon the earth who really have striven to live by the light of faith, who have worked unceasingly for

Christ, and ever pleaded His merits in prayer; but they have been the very first to enroll themselves among the guilty, and each one has pleaded with the publican, "God be merciful to me a sinner." The true believer in the Cross has no ground, and feels no ground for boasting in his holiness—there is no place upon the earth where the voice of temptation is silent, no sure refuge from sin—do what we will, believe what we will, say what we will, we are still unprofitable servants: and as we think over the many sins that nailed the Son of Man to the Cross, all thought of judgment upon others passes away from our minds, and conscience, speaking to us for God, pleading in the name of the Judge, warning in the mercy of the Saviour, points unto ourselves the finger, and declares to ourselves the judgment of Nathan unto David—"Thou art the man."

My brethren, I cannot tell you what secret sins are burdening your hearts any more than you can know what load of guilt is weighing down my spirit. That each of us has his burden to bear I know full well, for such is the common lot of every man upon the earth. There are travellers wandering about the world seeking for

entrance into our hearts, which ought to be the temples of the Holy Ghost; they are calling upon us loudly to spread a feast of sin, and offer sacrifice unto idols. It may be we have not wished to shed blood, or to rob any man of his ewe lamb, but there, in the Gospel, is the Christian's law in the teaching of Christ, and who shall say he does not daily offend in thought, and word, and deed? We may talk over our neighbours' sins and shortcomings, and appear more righteous than they, but our own consciences, if only we will hear them, are calling upon each one of us with a message from Heaven, saying, like the prophet to the indignant King, "Thou art *"the man."*

And as we hear this voice speaking to us every hour of our lives : as we hear it plainer, in sad reproachful tones, when we think of the mercies of God showered upon our heads with a bounteous hand ; above all, when we think of the sacrifice of the Cross, and the sufferings of Christ, let the penitent cry of Israel's King find an utterance on our lips, and an echo in our hearts, " I have sinned against the Lord." It is not enough that we see in our guilt an offence against ourselves and our neighbours : it is not

enough that we hate sin because it makes us unhappy, turning the sunshine into clouds: we must look upon every yielding to temptation as an offence against the purity and holiness of God, as one of the nails in the precious body of our Redeemer, as a thorn in His bleeding brow.

But I have yet to direct you to the answer of the prophet, which followed closely on the king's confession of his guilt—"Nathan said unto David, The Lord hath put away thy sin, thou shalt not die." This answer, bright with the beams of loving mercy, has a deeper and grander meaning for us. The mercy of the Old Testament swells a thousand-fold as it comes into the light of the new; the promise, "Thou shalt not die," spoken of the body, read by the Gospel of love is the promise of an immortality of blessedness to the soul of the penitent sinner, trusting in the blood of his Saviour.

Upon Calvary's Mount there were three crosses, representing the whole world, and all that the love and the mercy of God could do for it. On the centre one was nailed the spotless Lamb, our Passover sacrificed for us, the centre of our faith, the corner stone of our building, the anchor

of our souls. On one of the other crosses was an evil man dying in his sins, close enough to a fountain, of which he would not drink, within reach of an arm that he would not grasp. We leave him to the mercy of his God. But on the other side was one who was sorry for his sin, and saw in the bleeding form beside him escape from all the terrors of death, and a sure passport into eternal life. These three forms are still to be seen—the godless, the Saviour, and the contrite heart : and the answer to the penitent is still the same, a promise of Paradise with his Lord.

If there come unto us travellers from Hell, knocking and beating at the doors of our hearts, and calling loudly for an entrance, is there no other voice to be heard above them all, sweeter in its tones, and lovely with the music of Heaven?

“Behold ! I stand at the door and knock ; if
“any man hear my voice, and open the door, I
“will come in to him, and will sup with him, and
“he with me.” This is no summons to a feast
of sin, no call to a banquet of crime : the traveller that thus sues for an entrance is He who once wandered upon the earth, and had not where

to lay his head: who went about doing good, bearing our sicknesses and carrying our burdens. Not for Him shall we cast our eyes upon another's blessings in the hateful spirit of the covetous: not for Him shall we be prompted to take the poor man's lamb and dress it for the feast. He came to fulfil the moral law, and seal it with His blood. Charity, mercy, forbearance, love, are the burden of His teaching, and self-denying labour is the lesson of His life. Open the door now, as His voice is sounding, and no contrite penitent shall be too late to receive Him as an abiding guest. As conscience, a true prophet, burdened with a message from Heaven, sternly points out to us our manifold transgressions, our frequent falls, trying us in a merciless court, and crying unto each of us, day by day, and hour by hour, "Thou art the man!"—let us remember the answer of the prophet to the penitent king, "The Lord hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die."

The shadow has passed into the glorious substance, the law has brightened into the Gospel of love. Angels, loving unselfish messengers, glad in the gladness of men, and rejoicing as every soul is led toward Heaven, sing the song of

redemption, and watching over the Saviour at His birth and at His death, point to the only refuge for the weary soul, the only passport into joy everlasting—"Behold the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sins of the world."

SERMON VIII.

THE MISSPENT PAST.

JOEL ii. 25.

“And I will restore to you the years that the locust hath eaten.”

THE words of the Prophet Joel must have sounded with unmistakable power in the ears of the stricken Jews. They were suffering beneath the mighty hand of God : punished and humiliated for their countless sins of disobedience and disregard of the Divine Majesty. The divinely-commissioned prophet called them to penitence, and fasting, and prayer, and in the midst of the darkness shone out the bright and beautiful light of the Father's promise, “I will restore to you the years that the locust hath eaten.”

How strangely and wonderfully is the long suffering of God shewn forth in the history of the rebellious Jews. Here, doubtless, ere the

Cross was reared on Calvary, prevailed the intercession of Jesus—the Lamb slain before the foundation of the world. The Jews of the Saviour's time had a wonderful past, as a nation, to look back upon : from the exasperating hour of Christ's betrayal and crucifixion to the disobedient wanderers from Egypt.

Israel was the barren tree from which in vain the Lord sought fruit to rejoice in. This tree was planted by God's own hand, nurtured by God's loving, fatherly care, and watered by the refreshing dew of Heaven. Three times did God seek for fruit, and each time the search was vain. Moses led them forth from the midst of their enemies, and springs rose up in the wilderness : water flowed from the barren rock, and manna fell from Heaven : their enemies fled before them, and the walls of Jericho fell down at the sound of their trumpet's blast : they were surrounded by every mercy, and blessed with every bright hope, and yet, for all that, they still hardened their hearts, and blinded their eyes, and must have been cut off by the justice of Jehovah had not the voice of merciful pleading been heard before the throne, "Lord, let them alone this year also."

Then, once again, did the Dresser of the vine-

yard watch tenderly for the first bud of promise. He lopped off the withered branches, and shielded His chosen tree from the blasts of the cruel wind. God sent His prophets to Israel to startle them from their death-like slumber. He reasoned with them, and punished them, but still they disregarded the voice of the Prophets, as they had despised the teaching of Moses, and the axe had well-nigh fallen at last upon the root of that fruitless tree. Matchless mercy of God! Notwithstanding all their rebellion, their base ingratitude, their innumerable transgressions against the law of purity, once more the voice of Love is heard upon the very judgment seat, "Lord, let them alone this year also."

The teaching of Moses has failed: the warnings of the prophets had been set at nought. Then a greater than Moses, and a mightier than the prophets, left the bright glories of His Father's kingdom, took upon Him our flesh, and trod the thorny path to Calvary. He taught His rebellious children with the tenderest pity: He healed their sick, and raised their dead: He comforted the mourning heart, and strengthened the feeble knees. And still there was no fruit. They disregarded His teaching, and ascribed His

power unto Satan ; they pierced His hands and His feet, and crucified the Lord of glory. The day of mercy had an end, the day of justice came at last. Jerusalem, that sweet mountain city of the Lord, was laid even with the ground : her palaces became a heap of ruins, and the hand of the spoiler was upon every shrine ; and the sweet music that once mingled its strains with the whispering palms beside the river, gave place to the howling of wild beasts in a fallen and God-forsaken land.

At any time, had they turned to God with penitence and amendment, the wicked past might have been blotted out, and the present and the future made bright and radiant with the realized beauty of the Father's bountiful promises. There is no more pathetic picture in the whole history of mankind than that of the dauntless prophets of old, pleading earnestly with the sons and the daughters of their people to come resolutely back again to their first Love, whom they had forsaken for the idols that were leading them to ruin. It seems strange that the language of passionate entreaty, poured forth from the hearts of those who could foretell the coming desolation, should have had so little power to

stay that almost resistless current of iniquity which was eventually to render a proud nation a band of hopeless exiles, and a gorgeous Temple, once worthy of the worship of the Great King, a heap of shapeless ruins.

Six centuries before the crowning sin put its seal to their doom, we find the Prophet Jeremiah warning, and praying, and threatening, that his countrymen might worship once more with a pure worship. He represents the Almighty Jehovah as an eager listener to catch the first faint cry of penitence, that He might forgive and welcome the outcasts home : he points from their hard and stubborn insensibility to the comparative wisdom of even the birds of the air, "Yea, the "stork in the heaven knoweth her appointed "times, and the turtle, and the crane, and the "swallow, observe the time of their coming, but "my people know not the judgment of the "Lord." The earth yields a rich and plentiful blessing, proof enough of a Father's love ; the seasons pass by in order, proof enough of Jehovah's power ; all nature bears witness to our blind disregard of the hand that is beckoning heavenward, our deafness to the voices that are calling us home, "The harvest is passed, the sum-

"mer is ended, and we are not saved."

The soul seeking earnestly after God, and living in the light that shines from His written word, beholds in Israel's history its own sad story. Ours, too, are the sins and the banishments, the forgivenesses and restorations, through Christ, to the Father's favour. What reflections must pass through our minds as we behold the time passing swiftly away misspent and unheeded. As we examine ourselves with relentless scrutiny, in the presence of an all-seeing God, how many accusations stand in array against us, causing us to bow the head in burning shame.

It is written,—“Know ye not that your bodies are the members of Christ.” Oh ! how often have we forgotten this, and made them ministers of evil ! In the days that have gone, never to return, how many have felt the fatal power of the lust of the flesh—that strong, surging, boiling tide of human passion, whose voice is heard in the meanest hovel, and the grandest palace. Sometimes it finds vent in that which is coarse and brutish, sometimes in refinement and luxury. It is the exaltation of the senses to the throne whereon the mind should reign and rule by the laws of God. There are f

thousand avenues through which it pours its poison, a thousand seductive voices which lead its victims on ; these voices strive to speak at all times, and in all places, and to drown the gentle tones of the Holy Ghost, who invites to purity as the soul's safest refuge. As it preaches, its one great text is self-gratification—ease, comfort, present enjoyment, present pleasure, the tingling of the blood, the thrilling of the frame, “ Let us “ eat, drink, and be merry, for to-morrow we “ die.” The life of its votary is the existence that passes from pleasure to pleasure, and basks in the sunshine : ignoring as mythical, or disbelieving as impossible, the grand ideal of purity which was shown, as our example, in the life of The Crucified.

Restore to us, good Lord, in this matter, the years that the locust hath eaten, that henceforth our bodies may be holy members of Christ, pure in His purity, and clean in His infinite virtue !

In our minds, too, we have grievously transgressed. The pride of life has made its seducing voice heard, and stifled the teaching of humility. This is the spirit that prompts men to raise themselves by unfair means above their fellows, to charm with unholy eloquence, to convince by

faulty arguments. It would lead on, step by step, to fame, sacrificing honour and glossing over truth. Under its influence the politician tickles the ears of the voters by specious promises and taking metaphors, pandering to their prejudices and ignoring their vices ; it has the power to place a man on the right hand of an earthly sovereign, and to exclude him from the presence of the King of kings. Its commonest form in these days is the exaltation of the human intellect as the supreme judge and interpreter of things divine. It is the foundation of the great mass of infidelity that is increasing around us, receiving the doubtful conclusions of the man of so-called science rather than the often proved and blood-bought truths of the Book of God.

Restore to us, good Lord, in this matter also, the years that the locust hath eaten. May we henceforth come to Thee meek and humble in mind as the little children whom Thy holy Son took in His arms ; content to wait until the perfection of mind and body in Thy presence shall open to us the mysteries that perplex, and banish the uncertainty of human knowledge !

And who has given the soul's purest worship to the King of kings and Lord of lords ? Per-

haps in this, more than in anything else, we feel the need of God's forgiveness and absolution. We have approached Him often with the lips when the heart's best affections have been tied to and entangled by the changes and chances of this mortal life.

As we thus look back upon the past in penitence, the thought may arise within us that those who had the care of our early years were not careful enough to impress us with the profound truth of God the Spirit's abiding presence; that we verily are the temples of the Holy Ghost. It may be so. If then we would have these years restored to us that the locust hath eaten, let us be careful to teach the young among whom our lot is cast that they are members of Christ, that the Spirit is willing to dwell within them. The simple fact of the in-dwelling presence of the Spirit by night and by day would beautify the temple of God in the days of childhood: if it would not, nothing would. A consciousness that God is about us, and beside us, and within us, must do more to keep the heart and body pure than all the obligations of manly courage and womanly virtue. Who can fail to perceive what nobility, what beauty, would be

shed, like a bright halo, around the character even of a little child who has been taught earnestly and prayerfully to believe that the Good Spirit vouchsafes to dwell within the childish heart? He surely would labour to make the temple fit for the Divine Guest: all hypocrisy, falsehood, meanness, and cowardice, he would strive to cast out as too impure for the holy presence. Amid all his faults and failures he would be protected by the loving dread that the Comforter and Purifier might be banished beyond recall, and might leave him to fight alone. Thus must we teach the young, if we would have them, when age comes and the troubles of this mortal life accumulate, look back upon the past with cheerful thoughts, without the sorrow and lamentation of a wasted life.

A man travelling through this life may be compared to one toiling up a long, steep hill; he may now and then halt upon his journey and view the landscape beneath his feet: look back upon the years that have gone. I can picture to myself no more unhappy lot than for a man to arrive at old age and to be obliged to look back upon a barren waste; opportunities of good passed by without an effort, talents squandered away in idleness and sloth, the years that ha

passed marked only by neglect. Repentance is not too late even then ; but we dare not wait till the eyes are dim, and the hair is grey, and the limbs are feeble. The old and the young alike must kneel in penitence and confess that they grievously sinned against the purity and long-suffering of a Holy God.

And as we rise from our knees after sincere confession of the misspent past and with firm resolutions of amendment, the promises surely are bright and cheering. The Cross has power to obliterate the past and to restore the wasted years. We must not dwell too long upon the ruins but build afresh a better and a nobler edifice. Having sincerely repented and confessed we must press forward, leaving that which is behind to the mercy of God. Some of us are ever too prone to look back upon the days and scenes of our bygone life, none of which can ever return save in the dreams and visions of a warm imagination. Some regret what seems to have been the greater innocence and greater purity of childhood's days: they almost long, as their sins increase and roll like the waters above their heads, that it had pleased the Lord to take them, when children, to Himself. The friendships that once were theirs

and are now dissolved by death, or distance, or the increasing cares of a busy life, seem sometimes to have been sweeter and purer than any that have cheered them since, and the words of the poet of our day awaken an echo in their inmost hearts :—

“ Oh for the touch of a vanished hand,
And the sound of a voice that is still !
Break, break, break,
At the foot of thy crags, O sea !
But the tender grace of a day that is dead,
Will never come back to me.”

But, to quote the words of another, “ Shall we hang over the corpse of the vanished days in fruitless regret, as if there were no such good days in store for our hereafter? The loving Lord who invites us to His bosom in penitence and faith, will not have us linger too long over the graves of the past, or lodge our heart’s best affections in the monuments of days departed. ‘ Let the dead bury their dead,’ is the voice of the Gospel. Dead souls, and only dead souls, can afford much time for plaintive and pathetic cries over an age that is gone ; to living souls the call is instant and urgent to do the work of God’s kingdom, assured that the ful-

“establishment of that kingdom will gild the future
“with a brighter ray, a tenderer grace than any
“with which the human memory can deck the past.”

The invitation of Christ to every soul is,
“Follow me, and let the dead bury their dead.”
We must act in the living present, ere it die and
be buried with the past. All the energy, all the
zeal, all the ardour, all the love we can bring to
bear upon the work of a single day, while it is
ours, is barely enough to win the approbation of
our Heavenly Father. If we have a sinful and
idle past, it cannot be too late, if we are in real
earnest to bury it from our sight : let it be done
in penitence and in tears, but still let it be laid
in its grave, and covered from our sight, and
rather than mourn too much and too bitterly over
what we have lost, let us rise to the struggle, and
gird on our armour, following in the footsteps of
Him who alone can lead us to victory.

“Follow me, and let the dead past bury its
“dead.” We must follow Him, not only when
the world seems journeying pleasantly beside us,
smiling at our devotion, and pleased with our
ardour, but when men speak slightly of His
name, and cast ridicule on the worship of His
temple, and the teaching of His creed. We must

follow Him not only when the sky is bright, and the sun is warm, but when the clouds are gathering, and the light is fading. We must follow Him, not only when He holds with us sweet Communion, and sheds upon our souls some rays of His blessed peace, but also when the battle seems to be against us, and He suffers us to be tempted, to be thrust into the furnace of affliction, only that we may come out purer and holier and closer to His side.

If we follow Him thus through life, it must be ours to follow Him further still. We shall follow Him through death, from which in mercy He hath plucked the sting: we shall follow Him through the grave, from which in triumph He hath torn the victory. We shall follow Him into Paradise, which He hath blessed and consecrated by His presence; and hereafter, when the judgment shall have been declared, and, for His sake, all our wicked past forgiven and forgotten for ever, we shall follow Him into Heaven, where now He is praying for us as we struggle to follow Him on earth, and strive to defend His cause. Then shall be the glorious restoration of all the years which the locust hath eaten.

SERMON IX.

AM I TOO LATE?

MATT. XXV. part of v. 10.

"And the door was shut."

WE can, all of us, perhaps, look back upon some particular time in our short lives, when, for something that we had set our hearts upon, we were too late.

Some wicked, unworthy son has, perhaps, left his home in order to have his own way; he has wandered through the world and given full play to his passion and his pride, forgetting the home of his happy childhood, and the mother's gentle love that cared for all his wants. But an hour comes when the past rises before his eyes, and repentance begins its work in his wandering heart; he can picture to himself his parents sorrowing over his loss, and longing for his return, and, presently, like the prodigal in the parable, he bursts the bonds that chained him

unto sin, and he cries with an earnest longing after holier things, "I will arise and go to my "Father."

My brethren, this has often happened ; scores of times a wilful, ungrateful man has made up his mind to re-visit the home he left long ago ; to make up, as far as he may, for the sorrow and the tears he has left behind him by his own fire-side. As he came nearer to the place where his father dwelt, strange feelings have filled his breast ; many years have rolled away ; many things have changed, and many things are still the same, bringing back by-gone scenes to his memory, uttering reproaches which cut him like a sword.

There is still the home of his young life ; slowly, with a fearful sickness at his heart, and a trembling in his hands, he walks up the old garden walk, in which, many a time, long ago, he had played with the companions of his boyhood : every tree seems to speak, every bush to utter its reproach. The door of the old house is opened to his trembling knock ; but the face and voice of a stranger answer to the call ; there is no welcome back again ; he has not even the right to enter within the old walls.

Unhappy man! the forms he longed to see, the hands he longed to grasp had gone away long ago from there; the sickness at his heart, and the trembling in his hands will tell him where. He must bend his steps to the churchyard—for there, awaiting the resurrection, lie the bodies of those whom he so cruelly wronged. He can never tell them now of his sorrow, his repentance, his returning love; for the rest of his life he must bear a burden on his heart, the burden of bitter sorrow for the guilt of his sin. For many long years he had hardened his heart and forgotten, and now the white stone, in the shade of the old Church, tells him silently that he is “Too late.”

My brethren, do you believe that a time may come in the sinner's life when God will refuse to hear his cry for mercy, though sorrow for his sin burst upon him like a flood? Is there a time on this side of the grave when the doom of his soul is fixed, and no prayers and no tears can change the sentence written down in the book? I do not believe it. I do believe there is a time on this side of the grave when the power of repentance may be taken away; when warnings disregarded during the many years of a guilty

life may make the heart so hard, and the eye so dim, that no voice can be heard from Heaven, no virtue seen in the blood of the Cross.

God never will, God never can refuse to look with pitying eyes unto the greatest sinners upon earth if only they will repent and cast away their sins, laying hold upon the blood of the Lamb ; for His justice is softened by mercy. He might justly destroy and cast us all away for the stains upon our souls ; but there is a sight His eyes can never see without beholding in it strong pleadings for tender mercy ; it is the Cross upon Calvary, and the bleeding form of His own Son, which is a sacrifice costly enough to pay every debt, a shadow wide enough and long enough to cover all the sin upon earth, and to banish all the sorrow from the world to come.

It is man who with his own hands puts the seal to his doom ; repentance on earth is never too late ; sorrow for sin is never out of season ; but the heart of stone can feel no sting, and there may be eyes from which no tears can flow, for all the fountains of tenderness within the breast have been dried up by constant forgetfulness of God.

But let us make no mistake. The man thus

given up is one who has no wish to return to holiness, no thoughts save those of impurity ; one who has ceased to believe in the existence of the God of the Bible, and who looks upon the story of the Cross as an idle tale. Let no man be disheartened. If there be within the breast the faintest longing after Heaven, the smallest spark of love ; if the eyes but even slowly turn in the direction of the Cross, and the heart give forth the gentlest sigh for the cleansing of the blood of Christ, I dare not tell you it is too late, even though the soul be on the very point of passing away to the unseen world. If we have one reproachful thought for our many sins, one pang for our dark deeds, and the stains upon our soul, this is proof enough that God has not forsaken us, even though our last hour be already come, and we be standing on the brink of the grave.

Oh, wonderful power of the blood of Christ ! One would have thought, judging by the things of earth, and the judgment of men, that a pure and holy God, clothed in the glorious majesty of Heaven, would have refused to accept the miserable, worn-out remnant of a life wasted and misused in the pleasures of sin. One would

have thought that He would have claimed the first and the freshest years of life, the healthiest vigour, the strongest arm and the brightest eye, that He would have taken no other sacrifice, heard no other prayers ; but that blood that is ever flowing before the throne of God, pleads even for the grey hairs and feeble frame, and is pure enough to cleanse the soul steeped even for fourscore years in the ways of evil, if only that soul will turn unto the Cross, and cast down there the burden of its guilt.

Most of us, my brethren, have been out in the fields when the clouds have been black over our heads and the rain has been falling fast. Suddenly, we have seen the bright sun break forth in a warm, welcome glow, as Heaven has been spanned by a grand arch, all perfect in form and lovely with colour. The Father's promise given thousands of years ago speaks to us and bids us look upward to the sign of mercy.

That bright arch in the Heavens tells us of a door opened into the land of promise, through which the weary and way-worn travellers upon earth may enter into rest. It is the sun shining upon the falling rain. Amid all the sorrows and sins of life, amid all the cares and heart-burn-

ings and temptations, straight through the clouds there is a way to the throne of our God, kept wide open for the returning sinner ; that door is held open by angel hands, who sing their song of loving welcome as we enter in—the cornerstone of that archway is the ever blessed Son of God, and the mark of His Cross upon the brow is our safe passport into that happy home.

Well may we ask in fear and trembling, as we are living in a world of sorrow and of sin, well may we ask, with the humbled sinner's prayer upon our lips, "Will a day ever come as ages "roll on when the door of heaven shall be shut?"

Let the Lord Jesus Christ Himself answer in that simple story which begins upon this side of the grave and ends upon the other—

"Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened
"unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and
"went forth to meet the bridegroom. And five
"of them were wise, and five were foolish. They
"that were foolish took their lamps, and took no
"oil with them : but the wise took oil in their
"vessels with their lamps. While the bride-
"groom tarried they all slumbered and slept.
"And at midnight there was a cry made, Behold
"the bridegroom cometh ; go ye out to meet him.

"Then all those virgins arose and trimmed their
"lamps. And the foolish said unto the wise,
"Give us of your oil; for our lamps are gone
"out. But the wise answered, saying, Not so;
"lest there be not enough for us and you; but
"go ye rather to them that sell and buy for
"yourselves. And while they went to buy the
"bridegroom came; and they that were ready
"went in with them to the marriage: and the
"door was shut. Afterward came also the other
"virgins, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us. But
"he answered and said, Verily I say unto you,
"I know you not."

Those ten virgins represent all the visible Church of Christ upon earth—every soul of man who is baptized in the faith of the Cross and worships, at least with his lips, the God of the Gospel. Those ten virgins represent unto us ourselves, assembled here to-day in the house of the Lord. Some amongst the number of those who are called Christians (and God knows well who they are) some are wise and some are foolish; some have bright and well-trimmed lamps and oil—a life-giving faith in the merits of Christ, springing forth into all the vigorous works of love, like the healthy fruit upon the living

tree; and some have lamps only, their oil is gone; they cast in their lot with the true worshippers of God; they pray, but their prayers come only from the lip; they work, but their works spring not from deep love cherished in the heart for God's mercies in Christ.

We all of us, the wise and the foolish, toil on together to the grave; side by side we are working, and side by side we come to the temple of God; we may give each other a kind word, a loving look, a warm grasp of the hand in trouble; but all this comes to an end, and once more, side by side, we sleep together in the dust. The Bridegroom is the Lord Jesus Christ; He has not yet come in glory, but He will come at the last, and then all those who are not upon the earth, will be sleeping in the grave. "While the bridegroom tarried they all slumbered and slept."

Our poor minds cannot picture the awful grandeur and majesty of that time which no man knoweth, when suddenly, like a cry in the stillness of midnight, attended by hosts of angels and archangels, the Son of Man shall come again, riding upon the clouds, to judge the earth. All sleep will come to an end—the countless bodies

of the just and the unjust must rise from their bed of earth—the sea shall give up the dead that are lying beneath the waters, and all flesh shall stand before God.

There is time enough while we are upon earth to trim our lamps and pray for oil ; but when once we have fallen into the last sleep, when the Bridegroom cometh, then, if we have no oil, who shall give it to us ? It is a thought to send us home with prayers for mercy uttered from the inmost heart in the name of Christ. We may be standing by the dearest friend, who held us up when we were falling, who sympathized in our earthly sorrows, and stilled them with his love ; who, for our sakes, bore reproach and suffered even scorn, and yet though he be willing to shield us from the sentence of the Judge, ten thousand times willing to give us oil, he never can have the power. There will be no shelter then in the arm of flesh, no help in a brother's friendly grasp—every soul shall answer alone, "every man provide "oil for his own lamp."

But the Bridegroom shall wed the bride. The Lord Jesus Christ shall lead home His faithful Church without spot : washed clean and pure in

His own precious blood. The faithful shall sit down at the marriage supper of the Lamb, "and "the door shall be shut."

Oh! remember our merciful Redeemer is speaking of the time when this life is over. Every favour, every blessing, every mercy, has been shown to the foolish virgins—the careless, idle, traitorous soldiers of the cross; the wandering sheep have been called back again a thousand times to the fold of the Good Shepherd, they have been sought after, prayed for, fought for, and wept over—long and lovingly has the door been held open by angel hands, and bright messengers from the Throne of God have often strengthened their failing faith—Christ has pointed to His pierced side, His bleeding hands and feet, His brow wounded with the crown of thorns—the Cross upon Calvary has been preached by faithful men, and faithful souls as they have passed from earth blessed with the vision of peace, have begged these wanderers to come home again to their God, and yet for all this they would not hearken, they would not enter in when the power was theirs, and now the feast has begun and the door is shut!

There is time now to trim our lamps and get

fresh oil. To-day the door is open, to-morrow it may be shut. We want more hearty, life-giving faith : let us pray for it : we want more honest and holier works, let us pray for them. We want upright lives, and clean hands, and that bright gift of lovely charity, which is the strong bond, binding all virtues together, and living on when all else shall be dead.

Our lamps are of no use without the oil. All our faith and our prayers, and our tears are nothing worth without honest, hearty, earnest work for Christ. The Lord Himself has told us of the words of welcome that shall greet those who for His sake shall be worthy of eternal life. He has drawn a picture of the faithful soldiers of the Cross entering into rest, and who shall doubt its truth ? As one by one the ransomed in the Blood of Christ pass into Heaven, safe for ever from all sorrow and temptation and care, the voice of the Master of the mansion bids each guest welcome to the feast. He speaks not of their faith alone, nor of their prayers alone, nor of their work alone—but looking back with the all-powerful vision of a mighty God, who can see things past, present, and to come—their strong efforts after good rise up before Him, and viewing their life in the

light that shines from the Cross as one great whole of love and faith and work together, He says unto each, and blessed be His Holy Name for His mercy, "Well done thou good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord."

THE END.





